

The Critical Roots of Cinematic Magic Realism: Franz Roh, Alejo Carpentier, Fredric Jameson

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Felicity Claire Gee, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Dated:

Abstract

Magic realism, a term built from two seemingly antithetical concepts, has evolved over almost a century into an international, intermedial mode, yet at no point achieved status as a movement. It continues to hold the interest of critics working in literature, art history, film, cultural theory and post colonialism. Conceived by German art historian Franz Roh in 1925 as an alternative to Expressionist painting, magic realism developed alongside the concurrent European movements of *Neue Sachlichkeit* and Surrealism. Overshadowed by the greater success and wider dissemination of these two movements, magic realism all but disappeared until its re-emergence in Cuba as a literary mode, defined by Alejo Carpentier's manifesto of the marvellous in 1949. After a decade working in Surrealist circles in Paris, Carpentier desired to reinvent their *merveilleux* for his native Latin America.

This thesis proposes a theoretical framework for the relationship of magic realist painting and literature to film. As a hybrid mode of the plastic and the textual, magic realism is constantly evolving, appropriating 'new' media to examine the exterior world from unexpected angles, what Roh refers to as a metamorphosis in perception. The marvellous and strange is juxtaposed with the quotidian in experimental, self-referential art in which photography, collage, film, and written word overlap. In 1986, Fredric Jameson deemed the hybridity and indeterminability of magic realism 'seductive', penning his first full-length study of cinematic magic realism as an alternative to what he terms 'nostalgia' or 'generation' films. Tracing magic realism from its emergence as a European modernist mode, through its developments in Latin America, it becomes evident that it has particular value as an ontological framework with which to express and examine points of socio-historical crisis.

Cinematic magic realism can, I argue, be imagined as a visual manifestation of Jameson's critical theory of the *political unconscious*, with emphasis not only his geo-political elements but on an aesthetic that took root in Roh and Carpentier's avant-garde modes.

Taking Roh, Carpentier and Jameson's 'manifestos', this thesis aims to uncover the key historical elements of the theorisation of *cinematic* magic realism in order to clarify its currency as a contemporary film genre.

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The Critical Roots of
Cinematic Magic Realism:
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Carpentier, Fredric
Jameson

Felicity Claire Gee

Introduction

i. A Brief Outline of the Field

Having long since waned as an art historical term, 'magic realism' found particular currency in Latin America during the 1970s to describe a form of literature in which social realism is combined with indigenous myth, folkloric storytelling, imaginary worlds and supernatural narrators. The most famous example of literary magic realism remains Gabriel García Márquez's novel *Cien años de Soledad* [One Hundred Years of Solitude, Colombia, 1967] which blends history and fiction to the point that the reader cannot distinguish between what is real and what is not. Weaving together the marvellous tales of his Caribbean childhood, supernatural events in the fictional world of Macondo where the novel takes place, and the horrific reality of Colombia's colonial past, Márquez creates a mytho-historical narrative focalised through characters who are to various degrees marginalised and oppressed. Juxtaposed with the unfathomable and unjust reality is a magic which does not seem completely antinomous because it represents a subjective reality. This magic often functions allegorically, representing an idealised or utopian vision or a past event. Indeed, Márquez's novel illustrates perfectly the critical contention that 'Magical realism turns out to be part of a twentieth-century preoccupation with how our ways of being in the world resist capture by the traditional logic of the waking mind's reason' (Mikics 1995, 372). Rationality, to a large extent, is what magic realism rails against.

Between 1925 and 1949, five significant texts were published in which writers questioned traditional realism in art and literature through discussions of the role of magic or the 'marvellous'. The first of these was written by French Surrealist André Breton (1896-1966) in his *First Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), in which *le merveilleux* is identified as the moment at which the mysterious or unexpected erupts into everyday life: the remains of a memory or dream, the unexpected spark created by the juxtaposition of antithetical elements, a commodified object in human form (mannequin, automaton), a ghostly apparition or a vivid premonition. In the marvellous Breton seeks an alternative reality unbound by social limitations or conventions. A year later, in 1925, having

read Breton's manifesto, German art historian Franz Roh defined a new movement of painting that identifies the weird and 'lugubrious' qualities of exterior reality in a book entitled *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus Probleme der neuesten Europäischen Malerei* [After Expressionism, Magic Realism: The Problem of the New European Painting]. Despite the obvious comparisons, Roh is adamant that his mode is not another fashionable 'ism', and strives to distinguish it from Surrealism.

The third text was written by Argentinian novelist Jorge Luis Borges in 1932, an article entitled 'Narrative Art and Magic'. Borges explores textual magic through the literary heritage of the 'psychological novel' in European and North American fiction and applies this formula to a re-evaluation of Latin American writing. Similarly, but with very different results, Breton's friend and fellow Surrealist Pierre Mabillet's (1904 – 1952) *Le Miroir de Merveilleux* [Mirror of the Marvelous, 1940] also turns the reader's attention to the question of literary heritage, focusing upon the links connecting mythical and folkloric literature to the marvellous. Reflecting on Mabillet's legacy in the preface to the 1962 reprint of the text, Breton writes: 'let there be no doubt that Pierre Mabillet weighed - in gold dust - the two terms in this title [...] the marvelous illuminates the furthest extremity of vital movement and engages the entire emotional realm' (Breton 1998, 4). The psychodynamic movement between subject and object is essential to each of these theorisations of the magical or marvellous. The final text in this history is Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier's (1904-1980) 1949 manifesto *Lo real maravilloso americano* [(Latin)American marvellous real] which was published as the preface to his first novel *El reino de este mundo* [The Kingdom of This World, 1949]. Formulated as a rejection of his Surrealist education (Carpentier spent 11 years in Paris, 1928-1939, collaborating with a number of artists and musicians) his strand of the marvellous addresses the ontological magic of an 'authentic' rather than 'manufactured' Latin American reality. Of these four writers, only Borges continued to use the term 'magic' first introduced by Roh, while Carpentier followed the Surrealists, giving the concept greater weight in the form of a noun. For the purpose of this thesis, which aims to provide a more comprehensive reading of the cinematic marvellous, or cinematic magic realism, only three of these texts will be examined in detail - Breton's, Roh's and

Carpentier's – because each has had a clear and evident impact on the cinematic counterpart and contributes to a fuller understanding of magic realism in the context of modernism and the European avant-garde.

As a critical approach to unstable, polyvalent, ephemeral, problematic and unknown aspects of reality, the mode of magic realism was destined to be appropriated by a range of artists and writers irrespective of their individual backgrounds. Over the past twenty years, it has proved persistent as an intermedial category spanning literature, painting, photography, film, gender studies, postcolonial studies, queer theory, feminism, Marxism and postmodernism. Yet emphasis has remained for the most part on its literary variant, largely thanks to two anthologies, Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris's *Magical Realism: Theory, History and Community* (1995), followed by Stephen M. Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang's *A Companion to Magical Realism* a decade later (2005). Zamora and Faris's critical anthology functions primarily as the key English language resource on magic realism, providing translations of foundational critical texts together with a range of contemporary scholarship. Hart and Ouyang's collection takes a 'global' view of magic realism, one which defines the mode as an international literary phenomenon. Although *Cien años de soledad* cemented magic realism firmly in readers' imaginations as Latin American, the scope of the material presented in each of these anthologies reveals its influence in disparate places: British and Anglo-Indian fiction, North American Jewish crime novels, nomadic writing in the Maghreb, Australian and Canadian fiction, Japanese fantasy fiction. At this point, the reader begins to question whether the ambiguity that the antithetical moniker of magic realism presents could be ascribed to any literary text that combines elements of social realism with fantasy. Indeed, Hart and Ouyang raise this question in the introduction to their anthology: 'If *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* can be magical-realist, then, the argument goes, surely anything can be part of the discourse of magical realism?' (2005, 12) However there remains, as Fredric Jameson attests, something strangely seductive about magic realism as a potential genre (1986a, 302), to which each of the essays in these anthologies contributes. The strength of this 'seduction' I believe, is reinforced through critical delimitations which define magic realism in contrast to neighbouring genres

such as fantasy, Gothic, the Surrealist *merveilleux*, science-fiction, and the fairy-tale. In particular Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975); Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981); Amaryll Chanady's *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy* (1985); Raymond Trousson's 'Du Fantastique et du Merveilleux au Réalisme Magique' (1985) and María-Elena Angulo's *Magic Realism Social Context and Discourse* (1995), argue for magic realism as a distinct mode. Scholarship has also focused on a thematic categorisation of the mode, of which William Spindler's 1993 'Magic Realism: A Typology' has contributed to a more permeable conception of the overlap between European and Latin American forms [see appendix i:1].

Throughout this thesis I shall use the terms 'magic realism' and 'cinematic magic realism' to indicate an international, intermedial mode of criticism and artistic practice. The use of 'magic' as opposed to 'magical' is a deliberate choice based on the inception of the mode in modernist art criticism. Franz Roh's 1925 coinage of *magischer realismus* (which translates as magic realism) is the point of origin from which this research begins. Later adaptations and additions to the mode, *magisch-realisme* (Holland), *realismo mágico* (Spain) and the influence of the French avant-garde's *le merveilleux*, led to the Latin American variant *lo real maravilloso*, all of which will be referred to by their labels in the original language. Although magical realism has tended to dominate studies of contemporary literature, Jameson chooses to apply the term magic realism to his evaluation of its cinematic counterpart, a decision which this research follows.

The mode of magic realism has never reached the status of 'genre' or movement, existing primarily as an analytical approach rather than a definitive style. This is reinforced by the absence of collaborations, groups, salons, or circles of artists working together under the title of magic, or marvellous, realism. Therefore it will be referred to as a 'mode' throughout, a decision that is clarified by Jameson's definition below:

For when we speak of a mode, what can we mean but that this particular type of literary discourse is not bound to the conventions of a given age, nor indissolubly linked to a given type of verbal artifact, but rather persists as a temptation and a mode of

expression across a whole range of historical periods, seeming to offer itself, if only intermittently, as a formal possibility, which can be revived and renewed? (1975, 142)

ii. Magic realism and film: A relationship lacking in clarity

The idea for this thesis stems from the debates surrounding this critical delimitation. I first encountered the field of magic realism when studying Angela Carter's novel *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), in which a dystopian, misogynistic world is magically transformed as a result of the shift in gender of the main character from male to female. The novel describes fantastical and mythical events without drawing attention to an anomaly between the two. In Beulah 'the place where contrarities exist together' (Carter 1992, 48) a transformative surgery takes place, giving re-birth to Eve who is highly conscious of her boundary-less identity: 'For I am not natural, you know – even though, if you cut me, I will bleed' (51). Each transformation is described in Carter's detailed prose as if it were an everyday reality, which ensures that every object and sentiment is prevented from straying entirely into the realm of the fantastic. Carter's novel prioritises a perception of reality that is constantly shifting, and can be considered magic realist in that it resists boundaries, allowing gender, realistic temporal and spatial frames to be transformed and transgressed thereby making political assertions¹. A few years later, I realised that each of three films that I had recently watched had variously been described as 'magic realist'. These films were Jaromil Jires' *Valerie a týden divu* [Valerie and Her Week of Wonders, 1970], Wim Wenders' *Der Himmel über Berlin* [Wings of Desire, 1987], and Jacques Rivette's *Celine et Julie vont en bateau* [Celine and Julie Go Boating, 1974]. I asked myself, what did these films have in common and how did they relate to what I already knew about the literary mode of magic realism? Notable in the critical discussion of magic realist films was the flimsy, insubstantial definition to which they were assigned, some of which appears in critical texts (Bowers 2004; Popovich 2011), but often in film reviews and websites². At times equated with a popular

¹ For material connecting Carter's feminism to the mode of magic realism see Maggie Ann Bowers *Magic(al)Realism*, 2004, 69; Utte Dapprich-Barrett, 'Magical Realism: Sources and Affinities in Contemporary German and English Writing' in *The Novel in Anglo-German Context: Cultural Cross-Currents and Affinities*, Susanne Stark (ed.), 1994, 333-346

² For online examples see www.magicalrealism.co.uk, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0071381/reviews>, <http://www.scene-stealers.com/top-10s/top-10-modern-magic-realism-movies/>

understanding of Surrealism, the description ‘magic realist’ seemed to add nothing to their analysis.

In 2010, London’s Barbican gallery organised a film season entitled ‘Surreal Film House’ to accompany their summer exhibition ‘The Surreal House’. In addition to films by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, Man Ray, Germaine Dulac, René Clair, Jean Cocteau and Hans Richter from the early twentieth century avant-garde, the programme included films made by contemporary filmmakers Jan Švankmajer, Terry Gilliam, Guillermo del Toro, Tim Burton and David Lynch. The resulting filmography has stylistic or thematic elements in common, which, when viewed as a collection, demonstrates the continuing legacy of Surrealist filmmaking. Although it can be argued that not all of these artists are practitioners of Surrealism in André Breton’s original conception of the movement³, each explores a version of reality through disruptive, oneiric, abstracted, and irrational transformation of the everyday. Michael Richardson has argued that when considering cinema in light of Surrealism, one must begin with this necessity to transform the world rather than with any stylistic or aesthetic considerations: ‘Their interest is almost exclusively in exploring the conjunctions, the points of contact, between different realms of existence’ (Richardson 2006, 3).

Significantly, the imperative to ‘transform’ reality is also a key characteristic of the mode of magic realism – a transformation in that one’s perception of a given reality is questioned by revealing new, (perhaps hitherto hidden or unknown) elements within it. The aim of exposing unusual, marvellous and mysterious aspects through art is often used, both in the case of Surrealism and magic realism, to raise socio-political concerns and explore them through an imaginary world. These imaginary worlds range from the abstract and oneiric, to representations of subtle shifts in consciousness that seem to transform the object world depicted on screen. What links Surrealism and magic realism is, as we shall see, an emphasis on objectifying human perception, and the human subconscious, through artistic practice. And what links the artists, writers, and filmmakers in this thesis, is their self-proclaimed aim to make thought visible.

³ André Breton did not permit Jean Cocteau to join his Surrealist circle, yet the Surrealist aesthetic in Cocteau’s films is evident.

Confusingly, of the filmmakers listed in the Barbican's programme, Gilliam, del Toro, and Burton are also often labelled 'magic realist' due in part to the believable synthesis of reality and fantasy in their work. Del Toro's *El Laberinto del Fauno* [Pan's Labyrinth, 2006] is widely considered to epitomise the mode of cinematic 'magic realism' (Kolker 2009; Bordwell and Thompson 2010; Klonowska 2010; Colman 2011). The director's mediation of a traumatic historical event – the Spanish Civil War – through the fantasy world of a young girl employs a range of visual conventions from folklore, horror, science-fiction and mythology. Thus, the film straddles a range of genres that are often cited in critical attempts to delimit the mode of magic realism, of which for film Surrealism is the most common. This is a perception, rather than a definition, of magic realism that persists in both popular and academic writing dedicated to the subject, and one which is equally confused in the 'genrification of Surrealist film'⁴ (Moine 2006, 107). To Surrealist critics such as Richardson and Moine, monitoring the definition of 'Surrealist film' is essential, yet for cinematic magic realism no such concerns apply; emphasis instead seems to be placed on its expansion across a range of genres and national cinemas.

At the time of writing this thesis, no book-length critical study of a cinematic magic realism that tackles the indeterminacy and multi-generic conception of the mode, or its application as a visual style has been published⁵. The critical texts that do exist have mostly emerged during the last ten years, spurred by a peak of academic interest in its literary counterpart in the 1990s, which converged with

⁴ In Raphaëlle Moine's persuasive essay on Surrealism as a cinematic genre, which maps the trajectory from André Breton's narrow definition and Ado Kyrrou's more inclusive *Le surréalisme au cinéma* (1963), to recent French reviews of films in the popular press, she finds that the idea of Surrealism as a mode of interpretation engages contemporary film critics. The 'idea' of Surrealism rather than the practice exemplified by its luminaries Buñuel and Man Ray, is, Moine concludes, responsible for directors such as Raoul Ruiz, David Lynch, Guy Maddin and Hayao Miyazaki being branded Surrealism. See Moine 2006. It is of note that Ruiz, Maddin and Miyazaki are also frequently designated as magic realists.

⁵ In 2011, PhD candidate Ljudmila Mila Popovich self-published her as yet incomplete thesis entitled *Cinemagic: Magic Realism in International Cinema*. The study offers a historical view of magic realism in the cinema which focuses on Tom Tyker's *Run, Lola Run*; Spike Jonze's *Being John Malkovich*; and Emir Kusturica's *Time of the Gypsies*, that fails to tackle the critical issues within the mode. To further muddy the waters, the conclusion expands into a vague outline for a potential genre of Hollywood magic realism, which includes such films as Cameron Crowe's *Vanilla Sky* (2001); Griffin Dunne's *Practical Magic* (1998); Ron Howard's *Beautiful Mind* (2001); and George Miller's *Witches of Eastwick* (1987). An ambitious project, Popovich's text creates more confusion than it solves, skipping over the critical heritage of the mode in favour of textual analysis of the films.

postcolonial and postmodernist scholarship.⁶ For the most part, discussion of film has been an afterthought. In order to address the confusion and move towards a clearer definition of what magic realism means for the cinema, it is necessary to identify key examples of criticism in the field in recent years. These can be divided into the following: national cinema in which films feature a highly underscored folkloric content; films in which an imaginary realm (signalled by a fairy-tale structure or a regression through childhood memory, for example) is juxtaposed with a contemporary reality; and adaptations of magic realist novels.

In her 2004 ‘companion’ to magic realism, Maggie Ann Bowers assigns just six pages to the category of ‘magic(al) realism in film’, surmising that a handful of films – characterised by their depiction of a collision of ‘two different and co-existing worlds’ (2004, 111) – can be considered to have magical real qualities hitherto reserved for specific kinds of painting and literature. She loosely defines the possibility of magical real film in the form of literary adaptations (an idea explored further in Robert Stam’s 2005 book-length study *Literature Through Film: Realism, Magic and the Art of Adaptation*); or in individual films that, like *Pan’s Labyrinth*, could just as easily be filed in a neighbouring genre. An example of the latter is Spike Jonze’s 1999 film *Being John Malkovich*, in which a magical portal, the only extraordinary element in an otherwise ordinary environment, is universally accepted as real by the characters. Bowers, following the criteria for literary magic realism, argues that the suspension of disbelief at the diegetic level prevents Jonze’s film from slipping into the realm of fantasy, an idea expounded by Amaryll Chanady in her textual analysis of the mode:

Although the educated reader considers the rational and the irrational as conflicting world views, he does not react to the supernatural in the text as if it were antinomous with respect to our conventional view of reality, since it is integrated within the norms of perception of the narrator and characters in the fictitious world (Chanady 1985, 23).

⁶ A selection of anthologies and critical study aids have reinvigorated the study of magic realist literature, offering English translations of early key critical texts for the first time, and widening the canon to include a range of international writers. See in particular, Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (eds.) *Magical Realism: Theory, History Community*, 1995; Jean-Pierre Durix, *Mimesis, Genres and Post-Colonial Discourse. Deconstructing Magic Realism*, 1998; Maggie Ann Bowers’ introductory guide *Magic(al) Realism*, 2004; Stephen M. Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang (eds.) *A Companion to Magical Realism*, 2005; and most recently Eva Aldea, *Magical Realism and Deleuze: The Indiscernibility of Difference in Postcolonial Literature*, 2011.

In Wim Wenders' 1987 film *Der Himmel über Berlin* [Wings of Desire] the interjection of a mind-reading angel into the 'realism' of Berlin's city life, an angel that desires to become human but paradoxically can only participate in this human world on an emotional level, traverses the boundaries between two separate worlds. Bowers identifies several key magic realist elements in Wenders' film: the interpenetration of real and 'celestial' worlds; a narrative content that corresponds to the colours on the screen (the angel's perspective is shot in monochrome, while the human world is depicted in full colour); the disruption of realism by a magical content; and magic as a means of 'initiating questions concerning philosophical issues' (2004, 115). As a theoretical discourse, this analysis is both too general and too ahistorical. The arrival of the angel in the human world had long been narrated by films such as Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) and the simple attribution of colour or monochrome is merely a reversal of the dream-reality structure in Victor Fleming's *The Wizard of Oz* (1939).

More recently, two film critics (Mazierska 2000; Klonowska 2010) note an 'exuberant magic' in a body of Polish-made films of the 1980s and 1990s⁷ that juxtapose an idealised portrayal of the lost Communist regime with a 'disappointing' present. Magic realism is, Klonowska, argues, 'a kind of ethnographic folkloristic form' (194) in that each narrative carefully preserves traditional values thereby 'rescuing them from oblivion' (186). If the convention of magic realism seems 'unlimited and universal' in its theoretical applications (these criteria can be applied to any national cinema), in practice, it is employed 'to explore rather particular themes and specific perspectives' and a 'national collective memory' (Klonowska 186; 194), which may also reveal a 'technological and cultural backwardness' (Mazierska, 2000). In terms of a contemporary Polish cinema, magic realism operates as an 'implicit rather than overt' (2010, 185) political discourse; social issues are expressed and worked through the imaginary or supernatural events, and magical objects, ensuring a symbiosis of

⁷ See Ewa Mazierska's discussion of the work of Jan Jakub Kolski in "Between the Sacred and the Profane, the Sublime and the Trivial: The Magic Realism of Jan Jakub Kolski," 2000, *Scope*, Vol.1:1, www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/phprint.php, accessed 23/02/11 Kolski's films borrow many of the literary devices that Mazierska defines in her succinct summary of magical realism and its global dissemination, and as such are closer to the work of Marquez, or Rushdie, where the supernatural has a greater role in the narrative.

realism and cathartic wish-fulfilment. However, similar ‘balance’ can be discerned in Vittorio de Sica’s *Miracle in Milan* (Italy, 1951), in which the poverty-stricken inhabitants of the shanty town escape their misery through imaginative means. Evidently cinematic magic realism is not constrained by geographical location or temporal specificity and in these examples functions at a narrative level in much the same way as has been argued for literary magic realism.

As for screen adaptations of magic realist novels, an exhaustive list exists, which has been dogged by simplified, Hollywood-style transfers of the original texts. Robert Stam argues that:

Magic realism and other alternative aesthetics bypass the formal conventions of dramatic, illusionistic realism in favor of such alternative modes as the carnivalesque, the anthropophagic, the reflexive-modernist, and the resistant postmodernist. These aesthetics are often rooted in non-realist, often non-Western cultural traditions featuring other historical rhythms, other narrative structures, other views of the body, sexuality, spirituality, and the collective life (2005, 317).

The complexity of magic realist aesthetics is especially difficult to relay on screen without resulting to outright fantasy, or as Harmony Wu has argued in her analysis of director Alfonso Arau’s adaptation (1992) of Laura Esquivel’s novel *Como agua para chocolate* [Like Water for Chocolate, 1989], without reductively commodifying the content ‘obliterating [for example] national or cultural distinction of Mexico, Colombia, Chile’ (Wu 2007, 302). Exceptions, of course, exist; Márquez was involved in the cinematic adaptations of a number of his works in collaboration with ‘Third World Film’ School in Cuba (see Stam 2005), although he maintained in numerous interviews that he never desired to see *Cien años de soledad* on the screen.

In 1983, Jean Weisgerber edited a collection of essays that embrace the intermediality of magic realism: *Le Réalisme Magique: Roman, Peinture, Cinéma*, which due to the absence of an English translation has not had the international influence of the later collections edited by Zamora and Faris, and by Hart and Ouyang (neither of which include essays on film). His decision to include essays straddling three media is testament to the mode’s transferable aspects. He finds

common links through the various combinations that are made manifest in each medium, for example: mimetic realism, a philosophical modernism, a combination of painterly and narrative structural framing, and a sociological context (1983)⁸. In his contribution to Weisgerber's volume Fabien S. Gerard asks whether cinematic magic realism signals a return to 'l'humilité': 'Inextricably bound to a questioning of certainties developed within a society in the throes of an ideological crisis, wouldn't magic realism be the reflection of an essential return to greater humility?' (1983, 288, my translation). Perhaps this notion of 'humility' links to the 'quieter' more contemplative depiction of reality that Roh extols in his description of new German painting in 1925. Certainly it can also be traced in the films of Belgian director André Delvaux, who is the author and subject, respectively, of the two essays directly addressing cinematic magic realism in Weisgerber's anthology.

There is no canon, or lineage of filmmakers who have labelled their work magic realist. A rare exception is Belgian André Delvaux, who in 1965, made a film based on Johan Daisne's magic realist novel *The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short*, (Belgium, 1912), a story told in the first person by a psychologically unstable school teacher who becomes infatuated with his young student. The film does not deviate from this style of narrative, or from the succession of events in Daisne's novel, but transposes the continuous stream of consciousness (devoid of paragraph breaks), into three segments. In Delvaux's film it is almost impossible to distinguish between what is real and what is a figment of teacher Govert Miereveld's deranged imagination. In an interview for *Image et Son*, (No.25, 1973) Delvaux repeatedly uses the term *réalisme magique* to describe the effect he desires for his films. Influenced by the work of René Clair, Alfred Hitchcock and F.W. Murnau, Delvaux explains how in each of these directors' work, mystery materialises from discrepancies and ruptures in a logical storyline, or from contradictions within the concrete reality and not from any supernatural cause: 'Ne parlons pas de fantastique, mais d'un travail sur la réalité pour en faire jaillir, si c'est possible, le sens' [We are not talking about fantasy, but about working on reality in order to bring out meaning] (Nysenholc 1985, 106). As Laure Borgomano explains, Delvaux's cinematic magic realism is characterised

⁸ This approach is later taken up by Liam Connell, (Connell 1998), who also finds magic realism to be inextricably tied to European modernism, avant-garde practice and material concerns.

by his dedication to present the imaginary as if it is real. She finds four principal means of conveying magic in his films: 1) first person narration; 2) each sequence proceeding from a point of conflict that is manifested in the real, from which a doubling between the real and the imaginary then develops; 3) the recurrence of symbolic objects – often with double meanings - that Delvaux explains as markers for the spectator to navigate seamlessly from reality to imaginary without suspending disbelief; and finally the score, which is used to echo themes in the main plot, and to subliminally influence the viewer's interpretation of the real (1988 34). In particular Delvaux's explanation of the function of the object is significant. Rather than acting as a metaphoric substitute for latent psychological material, or to indicate a magical departure from reality, Delvaux insists that in *The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short*, certain objects – a book, a portmanteau, a gun, a hand - serve to guarantee reality to the spectator. Their ordinariness is made strange due to the narrator's perception of them, but at the end of the story, the gun, for example, is a fact, a piece of evidence, whereas the narrator's recollection of the murder of his student cannot be relied upon. Magic realism is often associated with hyperbolic fantasy – such as the hybrid mytho-magical narrative of Tim Burton's *Big Fish* (2003) - but Delvaux insists that his own magic realism is more concerned with understatement [*litote*] and ordinariness (Weisgerber 1987 264).⁹

In an article entitled 'Between Surrealism and Magic Realism: The Early Feature Films of André Delvaux' art historian Georgiana Colville provides an analysis of Delvaux's film art that posits him between the two movements. Colville struggles to pin down an analysis outlining the co-existence of these two modes, and leans towards a reading of the films as Surrealist. So doing she inadvertently reverses Alejo Carpentier's claim for a Latin American marvellous in his 'manifesto' of 1949, which rejects the 'manufactured' practices of Surrealism, calling magic realism 'manufactured' and defining Surrealism as dependent on chance. For Colville, cinematic magic realism is concerned with structure and the symbolic placement of objects, whereas surrealist film is deeply connected to oneiric and automated inner worlds: 'To my mind, Delvaux's surrealism emerges from the

⁹ Indeed, in his persuasive materialist analysis of literary magic realism, Liam Connell argues that in *Cien años de soledad*, it is not the fantastical objects of the gypsies which seem the most magical, but the actions of the workers in the banana plant. See Connell, 1998.

level of the signified or content and could be perceived as the unconscious of his work, while his carefully elaborated magic realist structures constitute its signifier and conscious' (Colville 2006, 120). Colville's argument is characteristic in that it asks that the antithetical realms of magic (Surrealism) and realism (magic realism) be separated in order to make sense of the differences between them, but in order to view the film as Delvaux intended it - as a fusion of magical and real realms - unconscious and conscious thought must be held in symbiosis. Ultimately, her conclusion that 'magic-realist doubles and surrealist antinomies prove to be closely related' (2006, 128) does nothing to clarify the distinction between these two cinematic modes, demonstrating the need to examine this crossover in more detail.

A decade earlier, North American cultural theorist Fredric Jameson (b. 1934) penned the first of his essays on cinematic magic realism, entitled 'On magic realism in film' (1986), which was followed in 1992 by 'Soviet magic realism'. In what are two highly subjective analyses of a narrow selection of films, Jameson nevertheless plots a sophisticated theoretical framework with which to understand their alternative realism. Responses to the first essay have largely been within literary studies (Colville does not even mention Jameson in her analysis of magic realism), and have tended to avoid engagement with the films that Jameson discusses. And, for the most part, recourse to the German art historical mode of *magischer realismus* of the 1920s is absent from them. This is primarily due to Jameson's own acknowledgement that his reading of the mode derives from Carpentier's Latin American literary *maravilloso*, but also to his initial essay on magic realism being published in the same year as his 'Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism' (1986). Due to the proximity in publication dates, and to an overlap in material – non-canonical, non-'Western' art – the two articles have often been conflated, with emphasis on Jameson's analysis as anthropological above all else (see for example Aldea, 2010). However, Jameson's two articles offer the most detailed analysis of the cinematic mode to date. This thesis intends to examine the *aesthetic* as well as the geo-political implications of Jameson's cinematic magic realism in relation to the small selection of films that he discusses. Through a close analysis of these two essays and with recourse to the wider context of Jameson's writing on the 'waning

of affect' in postmodern culture, it is hoped that a more comprehensive understanding of cinematic magic realism as a mode will emerge, distinct from its literary counterpart and departing from reviews of poor literary adaptations of magic realist novels. Also of significance in this discussion will be the subject of Jameson's inclusion of René Magritte's (1898-1967) *Le modèle rouge* (1935) to his revised diagram of the cultural shift from modernism to postmodernism in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* in 1991 five years after 'On magic realism in film'. Magritte's painting is situated in the diagram midway between examples of modern and postmodern painting and labelled 'magic realism'. Jameson's deliberate intervention in the transition from modernism to postmodernism is central to this research and will be discussed in full in Chapter Three. That Jameson assigns the category magic realism to Magritte's painting is not coincidental. André Delvaux cites fellow Belgian Magritte as the primary influence on his filmmaking, deeming his trompe l'oeil paintings and his insertion of incongruous objects into otherwise ordinary and realistic milieu as magic realist: 'Le réalisme magique existe chez Magritte' (Nysenholc 1985, 106; originally published in *Heidelberg*, 1984). Both Roh and Carpentier also reference Magritte in their respective definitions of the mode, an art historical reference that will prove central to the cinematic variant.

iii. Narrowing the scope – modernity, film and magic

Since what lies furthest apart both in time and space can without difficulty be comprehended in a single act of consciousness – so too, the world of magic has a telepathic disregard for spatial distance and treats past situations as though they were present (Sigmund Freud, 'Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thought' [1907] 2008, 99).

Films, in sum, are potentially 'magical realist' they can make dreams realistic and reality dreamlike, giving fantasy what Shakespeare called a 'local habitation and a name'. As a technology of representation, the cinema is ideally equipped to magically multiply times and spaces. (Robert Stam, *Literature Through Film: Realism, Magic and the Art of Adaptation* 2005, 13).

Given its emergence as an art historical mode in the mid-1920s, the relevance of developments in cultural production and the cinematic apparatus is central to a categorisation of magic realism as a visual rather than a literary mode, particularly to the later emergence of a cinematic magic realism. The idea of the

cinema as ‘technical magic’ took hold of the popular imagination in the nineteenth century. Early photographic studies of movement by Eadweard Muybridge (*The Horse in Motion*, 1872, and *Animal locomotion: An electro-photographic investigation of consecutive phases of animal movement*, 1887); Thomas Edison and the Lumière brothers’ motion pictures of the 1890s, and Georges Méliès’ transition from stage magician to film director in the same decade are well-known examples illustrating the magical effect of technology, and of technology manipulated to emulate magic. In the words of Tom Gunning, all events, whether from ordinary life or devised from theatre and vaudeville, ‘were absorbed by a cinematic gesture of presentation, and it was this technological means of representation that constituted the initial fascination of cinema’ (Gunning 2004, 43). The medium’s spectacular ability to enforce the suspension of disbelief (firstly that the diegetic world is real, and secondly that the events unfold in ‘real time’) may seem magical, but by this definition Méliès’ superimpositions and ‘vanishing’ bodies are as extraordinary as a crane shot used to capture the full expanse of a tall building, or a film reel that plays the arrival of a steam engine over and over again.

By the 1920s and 1930s when Roh was honing his theory of magic realism, film directors were already recycling motifs and effects from early cinema. Roh, who is credited with the wider inception of magic realism, was an art historian first and foremost, but he expanded his critical evaluation of a new mode of German painting through practice – examining the properties of photographic reproduction for ‘magical’ effects in his own artworks. His particular theorisation of magic realism was part of a debate within modernism on objectivity and commodification, and considers the transformation of an ordinary reality through artistic reproduction. In the avant-garde, a number of artists (or ‘film-artists’¹⁰ and filmmakers were creating films that explored and deliberately drew attention to the medium, to an interchangeability of realism and artifice, to the mechanisation of culture and the irrational logic of capitalism. As Miriam Hansen has indicated, the cinema was an integral part of a new modern chaos,

¹⁰ In his book *Experimental Cinema: A Fifty Year Evolution*, 1971, David Curtis refers to artist filmmakers as ‘film artists’ throughout, which I find a useful term to emphasise the intersection of plastic media in the work of those directors who worked in or drew from painting, photography, and film.

‘the single most inclusive, cultural horizon in which the traumatic effects of modernity were reflected, rejected or disavowed, transmuted or negotiated’ (Hansen 2000, 341-2).

Avant-garde filmmaking was informed by the manifestos and film journals and magazines published during this period, many of whose authors also made experimental films. Of great influence was Italian Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s (1876-1944) Futurist Manifesto (1909); the writing of French filmmaker Jean Epstein (1897 – 1953), and those of German graphic film-artists Hans Richter (1888 – 1976) and Swede Viking Eggeling (1880 – 1925), French painters and film-artists Fernand Léger (1881 – 1955) and Man Ray (1890 – 1976), French filmmaker Abel Gance (1889 – 1981), and Soviet filmmakers Dziga Vertov (1896 – 1954) and Sergei Eisenstein (1898 – 1948), among many others. Roh was fully aware of the debates and the potential that cinema brought to art historical discourse of the early twentieth century, yet his own writings engage primarily with painting and photography. However, this thesis will trace his consistent fascination with dynamism – both perceptual and formal – and his theoretical discussions of artistic representation of the post-war object world, which will lead to an exploration of parallel concerns and theorisations within early and contemporary film theory.

As a German art historian, Roh’s focus was primarily on art produced in his native country, and the principal link between his criticism and film lies with German Dada (particularly the photomontages and collages of his friend Max Ernst (1891 – 1976)). Citing the Futurists as a direct influence on Dada, Roh claims that both of these art movements take ‘pleasure’ in the dynamism of and between objects: a ‘pleasure’ in the ‘tumultuous event’ (Roh 1968 [1958], 129). I consider this to be the key to understanding Roh’s *magischer realismus* for a study of cinema. For him magic is created through a disruption in our perception, and thus judgement, of reality. In his essay ‘German Abstract Film in the Twenties’, Malcolm Le Grice puts forward the theory that time and flux enter avant-garde film via two distinct art historical legacies: Cubism and Futurism. Cubism, he argues, led to an awareness that the act of representation takes place in time and is subject to the changing perception of the artist. Cubism rather than supressing the flux of movement into a 'conventionally unified perspective' allows it to

remain: a 'perceptual dynamic' (Le Grice 1979, 31). On the other hand, in Futurist art he finds a different type of movement located in the subject rather than the painter', a kinetic dynamic' (31). While a viewer can see modifications to the formal qualities of the object in terms of movement in both Cubist and Futurist art, Le Grice makes a distinction between the two which converges upon the key question of this thesis as initially proposed by Roh in *magischer realismus*: how does a work of art generate both perceptual (individual) spectatorial possibility and a kinetic dynamic that augments the boundaries and possibilities of the objects themselves? As we will see, Roh's often contradictory analysis of the magical aspects of modernist art are fairly widely inclusive of artistic trends in painting and camera-based art in the early twentieth century. What remains consistent is, regardless of the level of experimentation in form and structural composition, his insistence that each work of art he considers to be magically real constructs a dynamic tension between the perception of the viewer and the mysterious qualities of the objects portrayed on the paper, canvas or screen. In particular I suggest that Roh's close relationship and high regard for Bauhaus film-artist László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) informed his own understanding of new spatial and kinetic possibilities for art in the 'mechanical'¹¹ age, which will be discussed below.

By highlighting the Dadaist legacy in his own revision of German art history Roh speculated on the 'fantastic' potential of montage to be able to transform the ordinary, a harnessing of contingent parts to make an unexpected whole that later became a defining characteristic of Surrealist cinema. Roh's definition of montage does not extend to a discussion of cinema, nor does he address the potential for poetry that Surrealists encountered in the 'disorientating power of combined photographic images' (Ades 1976, 19) and upon whose principles filmmakers such as Jean Cocteau based their visual aesthetic. The 'poetic' is largely unaddressed in Roh's analysis of avant-garde practice, but, as will become clear, is often mentioned by him in descriptions of the plastic marvellous, and is taken up much later with a similar ambiguity by Jameson in his attempts to define cinematic magic realism. For Marxist Andy Merrifield imagination and

¹¹ I have taken this usage of the term mechanical from Walter Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in which he discusses the social, aesthetic and economic implications of increased reproducibility of the image as a result of technology. (Benjamin 1999)

movement reside in the poetic, and the act of poetry enables a perspective on reality that is outside hegemonic boundaries: ‘somewhere else, somewhere inaccessible to power [...] the unity of dream and action is reconciled in the poetic act, in the poetic moment, and that can produce its effect with the certainty of lightning’ (Merrifield 2011, 162-163). The metaphor of lightning is one frequently used by Roh to describe the unexpected fissures or joins in modern art, but he also associates it with the materials, processes, and developments in the practice of photographing an object. Poetry, for Roh, is part of *magischer realismus*, but remains a more ‘lyrical’ quality that he associates with a painter such as Henri Rousseau yet never fully explains. In order to relate Roh’s theories to cinematic magic realism, this thesis will look more closely at developments in European filmmaking and film criticism that both support and differ from his writing on the subject of capturing reality and recording its hidden aspects. It will explore the extent to which cinematic magic realism has been influenced by early film and film criticism and by Surrealism; and the extent to which it has departed or adhered to Roh’s primarily non-political mode of *magischer realismus*. It asks the question as to whether a Rohian magic based upon technical and material criteria (and which fails to clearly define ‘lyricism’ and poetry) is inextricably linked to Surrealism and its radical poetics. Roh distinguishes *magischer realismus* from Surrealism and Expressionism, and yet films made by artists in each of these traditions contain elements that are fundamental to Roh’s definition of ‘new’ art and a ‘new’ realism.

Ranging from the non-linear abstracted films known as ‘pure’ or ‘absolute’¹² cinema to the perfectly sutured illusory realism of classical Hollywood narrative, through a wide range of styles in between, studies of early twentieth century film are dominated by debates on cinema as an art, and cinema as an industry. There are, of course, many shades of grey in between. In his discussion of avant-garde cinema, Phillip Drummond refers to the plethora of styles of filmmaking during the early decades of the twentieth century as ‘internal vanguards’ (Drummond

¹² ‘Pure’ cinema is generally regarded to refer to films in which images and rhythms replace conventional plot narrative, thus deliberately rupturing the illusionism of classical filmmaking. Luis Buñuel cites Eggeling’s *Diagonal Symphony* (1925) as an example of ‘absolute’ cinema, in which ‘the artist’s sole objects are light and shadow in varying intensities, interpolations and juxtapositions of volume, mobile geometries. There everything is dehumanized.’ (Buñuel, *An Unspeakable Truth: Selected Writings of Luis Buñuel* 1995, 127)

1979), filmmaking that combines commercial, stylistic, visual, narrative, and ideological elements from both mainstream and avant-garde practice¹³. Of these, one movement is particularly significant to our consideration of Roh's relevance to a theorisation of cinematic magic realism: German Expressionism, a film genre that straddled the categories of commercial and avant-garde cinema. Combining the narrative legacy of its Romantic literary predecessor, the input of avant-garde set designers, graphic illustrators, and cinematographers with the commercial acumen of the UFA Studios (Universum Film AG, established 1917), Expressionist cinema has divided the opinion of avant-garde artists. Largely thanks to the work of Lotte Eisner's 1952 monograph *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema* it has been assimilated into the canon of German national cinema. But Expressionist cinema inspired part of a wider debate on the relationship between film and painting. At the time of their original release filmmakers measured Expressionist films critically against their own film practice. Jean Epstein, for example, criticised the overly theatrical staging and set design of *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1919) for being 'a serious corruption of cinema' that presents reality as 'nothing more than a still life, all the living elements having been killed by strokes of the paint brush' (Epstein 1978, 28).

In contrast *Caligari* proved popular with the Surrealists, but it was F.W. Murnau's 1922 *Nosferatu: eine Symphonie des Grauens* [*Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror*] that haunted the imagination of its erstwhile leader Breton who describes how it left an uncanny impression on him that was to eventually surface in one of his dreams. In the film at the point when Thomas Hutter crosses towards Nosferatu's castle the intertitle 'When he was on the other side of the bridge, the phantoms came to meet him', Breton recalls how he is unable to read these words 'without a mixture of joy and terror' (Breton 1990, 39). Murnau's work often explores the crossing point of two distinct worlds (dream and waking reality; country and city) or emotions (cruelty and kindness; desire and coldness; suffering and joy)

¹³ Germaine Dulac offers a definition of avant-garde cinema analogous to the non-mimetic qualities of musical representation: We can use the term "avant-garde" for any film whose technique, employed with a view to a renewed expressiveness of image and sound, breaks with established traditions to search out, in the strictly visual and auditory realm, new emotional chords.' See 'The Avant-Garde Cinema', in *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, P. Adams Sitney (ed.), 1978, 43 (Dulac 1978)

through what Eric Rohmer has called ‘une sorte d'opera visuel’ [a kind of visual opera] (Rohmer 1977, 9) comprised of three modes of space: pictorial, architectural, and cinematic (virtual). It is precisely Murnau’s combined aesthetic of panoramic landscapes (in the German Romantic tradition), employment of cranes and mobile units (to achieve fluidity of movement), and modern photographic perspective (the mystery of the manipulated object as set out by Roh in his writings on photography) that when set against a tragic or epic narrative that had such an uncanny effect on Breton.

Even in the more mainstream of Murnau’s later ‘studio’ pictures, film provided him with the opportunity to ‘capture’ both physical and mental life: ‘the interplay of lines rising, falling, disappearing; the encounter of surfaces, stimulation and its opposite, calm; construction and collapse; the formation and destruction of a hitherto almost *unsuspected life*’ (Eisner 1973, 13, emphasis in the original).

Whereas in literary narrative, a change in tense or the movement from first to third person narration signals a flashback or a dream, in cinema the apparatus is able to create the seamless illusion of transition between oneiric and waking worlds, or between a memory and a premonition. In contemporary films that have been described as magic realist, these worlds are often indistinguishable, and form a multi-perspectival version of reality. Given that magic realism emerges during an era in which photography and cinema and the critical debates surrounding them had become synonymous with ‘new’ art and modernity, it is unsurprising that these debates are an essential component of its expansion. Indeed technological advances in photographic reproduction are an important component of modernist magic realism, and will be addressed in relation to early films concurrent with the objects that Roh and Carpentier discuss. One must be mindful, however, that early writing on the cinema such as Antonin Artaud’s ‘Sorcery and Cinema’ [c. 1928], Ado Kyrou’s *Le Surréalisme au cinéma* [1952] and Breton’s discussion of the magical space of the movie theatre in ‘As in a Wood’ [1951, saw the experience of cinema-going, of a psychological identification with oneiric screen images, as magical. As Artaud writes in the late 1920s: ‘In essence the cinema reveals a whole occult life, one with which it puts us directly in contact’ (Hammond 2000, 104). Given the anti-Enlightenment,

anti-rationalist sentiment that drives modern art of the early twentieth century, the reinstatement of ‘magic’ and ritual is a crucial stage in the development of ‘new realisms’ of this period. Marcel Mauss and Henri Humbert’s *A General Theory of Magic* (1902), the wide dissemination of Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* (translated into French in 1923), Guillaume Apollinaire’s tongue in cheek ‘Little Recipes from Modern Magic’ [1916], Picasso’s reinventions of indigenous objects, Michael Leiris and Georges Bataille’s interest in documenting ethnological artefacts and using ritual in artistic practice, all contribute to a movement towards a secular magic. This secular magic, as opposed to a religious magic, is intrinsic to the emergence of Roh’s art historical term. None of the chroniclers of magic realism refer to magic or the marvellous as a religious or divine experience (although religious iconography and indigenous superstitious ritual certainly contribute to Carpentier’s definition of a Latin American marvellous), but rather as a narrative or visual strategy with which to approach the subject of reality, or realism. Art historian Christopher Green argues that secular magic is the modern artist’s means of expression, an expression that ties historical origins to thoroughly modern media (Green 2005).

These issues form a dialogue within magic realism, and certainly contribute to definitions of its social and historical milieu, but due to the enormity of the diverse theoretical fields (ethnology, psychoanalysis, anthropology) here they will form the framework rather than the central analysis of the thesis. Part of this framework also includes the proto-magic realists and Surrealists – Apollinaire, Edgar Allen Poe, Giorgio de Chirico, Lautréamont, Picasso – whose work is cited by Roh, Breton and Carpentier in their respective definitions of magic and the marvellous, and whose work, I believe, can inform a reading of contemporary magic realism. Given the diversity and breadth of the mode’s seeming applicability to contemporary film, this thesis will examine the emergence of a cinematic magic realism through its critical roots – the manifestos that brought it into being and through the objects and the texts that inspired these critics in the first place – in order to uncover a chronological methodology. It will examine how the combined approach of three men (Roh, Carpentier, Jameson), and their articulation of a modernist approach to social history, results in a critical, art historical mode that has been appropriated for such radical texts as Angela

Carter's *Passion of New Eve* and provides the framework for a cinematic mode that shows no signs of disappearing from the popular imagination. Building on confluences and repetitions in each of their theories, this thesis offers a methodology to counter approaches to the mode that have failed to clarify its 'boundary-less' applicability and 'fuzzyness'. It will propose a new approach that is based in artistic practice and critical writing in the European modernist avant-garde, but that also takes into account the hybridity of its international, interdisciplinary application. This thesis does not propose a definition of cinematic magic realism that will end debates on the mode's contradictory status. It attempts to situate it within a historical framework traced through critical theory first and foremost.

iv. Content

The thesis consists of three main chapters, each devoted to a single critic and their contribution to the expansion of the mode of magic realism. Chapter one focuses on Franz Roh, marking the inception of the mode through an examination of his book *Nach-Expressionismus*, and his underlying motivation for devising a term other than the more widely known *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Following art historian Seymour Menton's 1983 analysis of Roh's *magischer realismus* (but rejecting his Jungian reading of Roh's theorisation), this chapter will further examine the paintings that Roh selected to illustrate his text. It will discuss how the Freudian uncanny, the paintings of Giorgio de Chirico, and Max Ernst's collages all contribute to Roh's conception of a mysterious and enigmatic yet 'realistically' rendered painting. The second half of the chapter moves from painting to photography, mapping Roh's metamorphosis from critic to practitioner. It discusses the expansion of the mode through Roh's involvement with the 1929 *Film und Foto* exhibition in Stuttgart, and the accompanying photobook, *Foto Auge*, which he published with Jan Tschichold, (1901-1974); and discusses Roh's photographs and photomontages inspired by friends Ernst and László Moholy-Nagy. It concludes with a brief examination of contemporaneous German cinema, and considers examples of the films of F.W. Murnau in light of Roh's theoretical argument, asking whether a link can be made between Roh's photographic 'experiments' and the modern 'magic' exemplified in Murnau's films.

Chapter two moves from Germany to France, commencing with a discussion of the themes presented in André Breton's *First Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924) and his concept of *le merveilleux*. Although the first manifesto precedes Roh's 1925 book, it is discussed here in chapter two situated between Roh and Carpentier as each of these men's manifestos is in some way indebted to Breton's ideas. It finds Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier living in Paris in 1928, collaborating with artists associated with Breton's circle, thus forming the second significant link between Surrealism and magic realism (the first being Max Ernst's direct influence on Roh). Accompanying Carpentier's work of this period are a series of articles written on avant-garde and mainstream cinemas of the late 1920s and early 1930s, which have largely been overlooked in critical evaluations of his marvellous realism. These articles provide vital insight into the sources for his own Latin American mode, the differing modes of cultural production in Europe and the Caribbean, and his subsequent rejection of European Surrealism. But they also form a counterpart to Roh's discussions on photography and will be discussed here in order to better understand the impact of visual media on Carpentier's literary works. The latter half of Chapter Two outlines Carpentier's return to Latin America from Europe, the inception of *lo real maravilloso* as an ontological mode of magic realism and his modification of the term to include an analysis of a syncretic, postcolonial art. The synthesis of indigenous and colonial cultures, with the addition of those of the slaves transported from Africa, resulted in highly transcultural art forms that distinguishes Latin American culture from the modernisation and so-called 'primitivism' that Carpentier was sceptical of during his time in Paris. The chapter concludes with a discussion of two novels, two 'case studies', - the aforementioned *El reino de este mundo* and the 1953 *Los pasos perdidos* [The Lost Steps] - which illustrate the double-context for his work: art historical and political.

Carpentier's *real maravilloso* is most often termed 'ontological' magic realism (Spindler 1983) due to his proclamation that Latin America *is* marvellous; and this particular discourse of magic realism has encouraged a wide range of postcolonial and political readings of his work (Camayd-Freixas 2000; Slemon 1995; Chanady 1995). Critics have also tended to disassociate Carpentier from Roh's theoretical approach, based on the difference between Roh's theory that

perception transforms the exterior word into a magical one and Carpentier's insistence that the world (Latin America) is already magical. These differences are, of course, substantial, and yet in Carpentier's journalism of the 1920s in particular, his writing on film, his definitions of cinema's fantastic potential are similar to Roh's. In the introduction to their anthology of magic realist literature, Hart and Ouyang stress that critics need to 'cast off the 'Latin American straightjacket', to move on from purist readings of magic realism that are embedded in postcolonial discourse (2005, 20). I will argue that the postcolonial debate is an essential component of *lo real maravilloso*, but that the art historical legacy of Roh and the Surrealists, a European perspective, is of equal significance.

Given the political nature of Carpentier's Cuban *maravilloso*, it is of no surprise that it should have piqued Jameson's interest, and indeed it is the Latin American literary variant of magic realism which inspires him to make the leap to film. Chapter three, the lengthiest chapter, offers an analysis of Jameson's cinematic mode, and its wider implications for critical debates regarding an 'alternative' postmodernism. Critics have often found similarities between magic realism and postmodernism due to their mutual disruption of verisimilitude and linear narrative, but in his discussion of so-called 'Third World cinema' or cinematic magic realism, Jameson finds a discourse that potentially bridges the gap between modernism and postmodernism, that potentially reinvigorates the tired simulacra of a 'First World' culture dominated by reified images and glossy, nostalgic versions of history. In studying Jameson's two essays 'On magic realism' and 'Soviet magic realism', a list of aesthetic characteristics emerges by which cinematic magic realism can be measured and defined. The chapter concludes with readings of each of the four films discussed in Jameson's two essays, with particular attention given to Russian director Alexander Sokurov's 1988 film *Dni zatmeniy* [Days of Eclipse], an experimental, science-fiction hybrid that provides the most convincing clues to the identity of cinematic magic realism. Through this sustained analysis of Jameson's criticism, this thesis aims to clarify many of the ambiguities and misconceptions regarding cinematic magic realism, and to offer an alternative list of criteria for the further elucidation and application of the category.

Chapter 1 – Franz Roh's Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus¹: Probleme der neuesten Europäischen Malerei [Leipzig, 1925]

Seen from a greater distance in time, the many 'isms' of our century may one day be recognized as the various nuances of one and the same antirealism. For all of them have one thing in common: gone is the artist's desire to mirror objects in a prescribed world; instead he wants to depict the forces that may lie behind them. In Impressionism it was the life-stream of light and air, in Expressionism the power of color, in Surrealism the fantasy of the dream. Each time a different style led far beyond objective reality, until the latter disappeared absolutely in abstract painting (Roh, 1968, 7).

The emergence and persistence of magic realism in the twentieth century may be attributed to the Western world's search for an alternative to the limitations of an overly rational and technological society (Menton 1983, 9-10).

Franz Roh (1890-1965) was born in Thuringia, Germany, and studied philosophy, art history, and literature at the universities of Leipzig and Berlin, before embarking on his doctoral thesis on Dutch art under Heinrich Wölfflin (1864-1945) at the University of Munich. He became a renowned art historian, championing contemporary art in his journal contributions to, among others, *Das Kunstblatt*, *Cicerone*, *Werk* and *Die Kunst*. His subsequent work as art historian, lecturer, journalist, curator and artist, brought him into contact with a wide range of artists from the European avant-garde, most notably: George Grosz (1893-1959), Raoul Hausmann (1896-1971), László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) and Max Ernst. Roh had a particular interest in the development of photography as an art form and wrote extensively on the subject. This included a photobook which he co-edited with typographer Jan Tschichold (1902-1974) entitled *Foto-auge: 76 Fotos der Zeit* [Photo-eye], which accompanied the 1929 *Film und Foto* exhibition in Stuttgart. In the early 1930s, Roh also produced a considerable

¹ Throughout the chapter, the German *magischer realismus* will be used to determine the German art historical mode and where it is mentioned in English will bear the capitalisation attributed to it originally by Roh.

portfolio of photographic ‘experiments’ of his own that were greatly influenced by the work of Moholy-Nagy and Ernst.

However, it was in 1925 that he penned a book length study that was to mark the beginning of an international mode of magic realism: *Nach-Expressionismus - Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei* [Postexpressionism - Magic Realism: The Problem of the New European Painting]. The essay is a manifesto of sorts, setting out the characteristics of a new style of German painting, and it includes 88 black and white plates of paintings and lithographs that represent the new mode. No doubt influenced by Wolfflin’s contrastive analysis of renaissance and baroque styles in the influential study *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* [Principles of Art History, 1915], Roh sets out to clarify magic realism as a shift away from Expressionism, and orders the principle differences between the two styles into a table of 23 pairs of traits (see appendix ii:1). This chapter examines Roh’s methodology and discusses the artists he defines as magic realist, noting overlaps with the preceding movement of Expressionism and also with the coterminous emergence of Neue Sachlichkeit [New Objectivity, New Sobriety] and Surrealism.

The preface to *Nach-Expressionismus: Magischer Realismus* begins with the now much-cited phrase: ‘I attribute no special value to the title “magic realism”’, revealing an ambivalence that persists in all subsequent attempts to define the mode. (Faris 1995, 15) Unconvinced by the monikers ‘Ideal Realism’, ‘Verism’, ‘Neo-classicism’, ‘Superrealism’, or the ‘Post’ prefix, Roh chooses ‘magic’ to denote painting that privileges the deconcealment of mysterious elements in representations of modern life. He makes clear that the mystery does not refer to a religious spirituality or a fantastical dreamscape: ‘[it] does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it’ (16). For Roh the heavy brushstrokes and vivid colours in Expressionist painting obscure the world in an abstract system based on subjective and religious experiences that tend to ‘affect the spectator from afar’ (20). Expressionist art shows ‘an intense subjectivity which had no reluctance in destroying the conventional picture of reality in order that the expression be more powerful’ (Furness 1973, 14). Roh, whether wittingly or not, employs the Spinozan definition of affect for magic realism; his perspective on a closely palpitating mysterious reality corresponds to

Spinoza's claim that affect is a spiritual stirring in the emotions that is inextricably tied to social experience (Spinoza 2009)

i. The Pan-European Tendency towards Objectivity

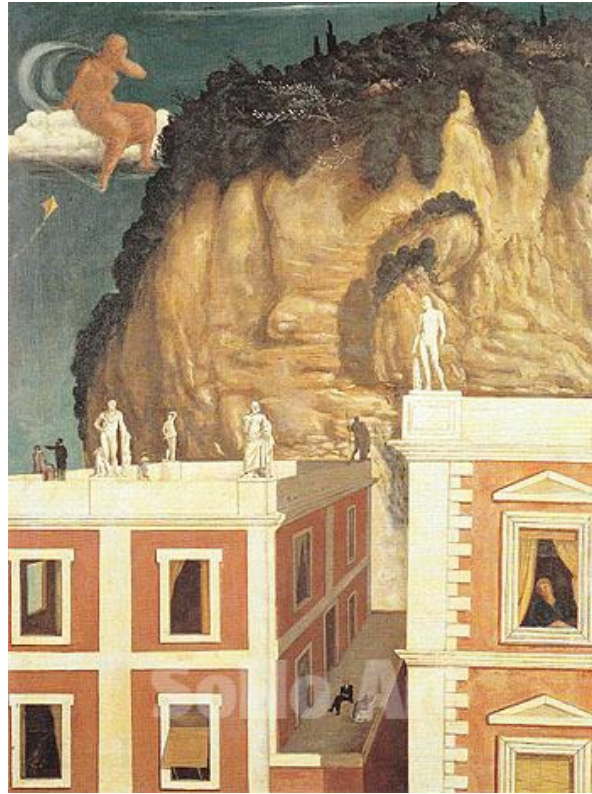


Figure 1: Georgio de Chirico, Römische Landschaft, [Roman Landscape], 1922, tempera on canvas, 101.5x75.7 cm, Private Collection

In the Institut Valencia d'Art Moderne's catalogue for its 1997 exhibition *Realismo Mágico: Franz Roh y la Pintura Europea 1917-1936*, art historian Marga Paz asks a pertinent question, why choose to build an exhibition around Roh's *Nach-Expressionismus*? Her answer is clear, it provides an overview of an era that is inclusive and diverse; it is significant 'Precisely because it reflected the *heterogeneity* of the situation which enclosed the return to reality directly in its own artistic and historical context' (Paz 1997, 270, original emphasis). As we shall see, the central paradox that defines *Nach-Expressionismus* is that Roh's insistence upon magic realism as being something distinct from the other 'isms' of the time ultimately results in a description that is entirely reliant upon precursory and contemporary art movements. Yet, as Paz suggests, the legacy of his terminology

and perspective continues to inform our understanding of the inter-war return to realism.

In his manifesto of *magischer realismus*, Roh stresses that 'realistic depiction' must recognise the immediate concrete facts of the everyday, evident in technology and nature, rather than abstract them from a distance. Through detailed and sober portrayal, he argues, the object world is revealed not as a mimetic reproduction, but complete with all of its mysterious and strange qualities: 'It is not, the "old Aristotelian idea" of imitation having a spiritual quality', he says, 'but of representing *the fact, the interior figure, of the exterior world*. This mattered very little to Expressionism.' (24, emphasis in original) The invention of a new style of realism in German art was a response to Expressionism, but also a response to significant social and political changes that were affecting the majority of Europeans following World War I. A significant shift away from abstraction and expressive excess can be detected in the increasing references to Giorgio de Chirico's (1888-1978) metaphysical paintings in avant-garde art of the 1920s, and also in the move from Cubism in Pablo Picasso's (1881-1973) work between 1919 and 1925 towards what Seymour Menton has termed his 'neoclassical style' (1983, 15). A similar tendency is evident in the German and French avant-gardes of the post-war period from *magischer realismus* to André Breton's Surrealism. Jacques Lassaigue notes how the non-naturalistic use of inanimate objects (fruit, statues) and the precise detail in de Chirico's painting 'affirms the permanence of things concrete by stripping them to the bone' (quoted in Raynal 1950, 170). New art movements looked back to de Chirico's thin tempera, airless sets, geometry, classical architecture and strange juxtapositions of objects in order to re-present reality simultaneously stripped bare and with its mysteries revealed. For Roh, de Chirico's painting displays a peculiar clarity that he believes necessary to a post-war realism: 'It continues to approach the ultimate enigmas and harmonies of existence through a hidden stereometry.' (1995, 23) Roh's description is typically opaque, combining various antithetical elements: the pairing of enigmas with harmonies, and the suggestion that a term conventionally used to indicate the measuring of solid, three dimensional shapes can be hidden. While these are not binaries as such, they are characteristic of a Rohian vocabulary designed to articulate the visual tension he

finds in *la pittura metafisica* and *magischer realismus*. I read Roh's decoding of de Chirico's painting as the foundation for his self-proclaimed mode of 'new' German painting. The composite parts he lists in the above citation: calm (harmony), enigma (mystery), thought (hidden) and objectivity (stereometry) are an attempt to articulate the movement between subjective and objective states that, for him (and de Chirico), renders reality mysterious.

In his famous 1919 essay 'On Metaphysical Art' originally published in the Italian art journal *Valori Plastici*, the artist makes some significant points regarding his creative intentions that can be related back to Roh's citation. He explains how flat surfaces can be disturbing as they hide unknown depths; and how a room can seem perfectly ordinary until the logic of its elements are broken by the individual thought processes brought to it by the viewer: 'who knows what terror and perhaps what sweetness and consolation I would feel when contemplating that scene' (de Chirico 1971, 90). He adds that: 'The appearance of a metaphysical work of art is serene; it gives the impression, however, that something new must happen amidst this same serenity, and that other signs apart from those already apparent are about to enter the rectangle of the canvas' (90). These 'other signs' are what Roh is struggling to define, and will be of central concern to our analysis of cinematic magic realism.

Both de Chirico's and Picasso's paintings feature in *Nach-Expressionismus*: de Chirico occupies a double page with his *Selbstbildnis* [*Self Portrait*] (1911) set opposite *Römische Landschaft*, [*Roman Landscape*, 1922] [Figure 1] and Picasso's *Seated Harlequin (The Painter Jacinto Salvada)*, 1923] [Figure 2] (which Roh titles *Harlekin*). Roh knew and appreciated the prominent Italian art journal *Valori Plastici* (1918-1922), which was largely responsible for the wider circulation of *la pittura metafisica* (metaphysical painting) in European art circles. Indeed reproductions of de Chirico's *Il grande metafisico* (1917, *Stadtplatz* in Roh's translation) and his self-portrait, along with Carlo Carrà's (1881-1966) *Il cavaliere occidentale* (1917, *Reiter* in German) were published in *Valori Plastici* as well as in *Nach-Expressionismus*. De Chirico's self-portrait depicts the artist in medium close up, his hand gripping what, due to the flattened perspective, could equally be a stone tablet or a sheet of white card with the Latin inscription 'Et Quid Amabo Nisi Quod Metaphysica Est?' (And what shall I love if not the metaphysical in

things?). Looking directly at the viewer, de Chirico appears to be asking this question in relation to the draped, faceless figure standing atop a columned building that recedes from the window frame behind him. The exterior scene, cropped with a small section of a Roman viaduct suggestive of its full horizontal width, is bright and hard, contrasting with the dark interior of the room and the fleshy realism of de Chirico's enigmatic expression.

In *Roman Landscape* the viewer is asked to consider a strange scene in which classical geometry, Romantic landscape and mythology collide. The resulting effect is one of painted collage in which two men seated on the roof of a building appear to be deep in discussion. Above them on the second level of the roof classical statues and a centurion are fixed statically, facing out from a cliff and mountains that recall Arnold Böcklin's (1827-1901) mysteriously dark landscapes. In the far left corner a classical goddess sits on a crescent moon, her feet dipping into the sky. De Chirico mixes clean, precise lines, with the cloudy swirls of Romantic art (exemplified in the work of German artists David Caspar Friedrich (1774 – 1840) or Carl Julius von Leybold (1805-1874), referencing several artistic styles and ancient motifs. No single figure, or section of the painting is emphasised more than another; no clues are given as to the order in which the objects should be apprehended. Walter Spies has referred to the non-logical juxtapositions in de Chirico's work as a 'multifocal perspectivism' (1991, 49) which highlights the distance between things, and between cultural periods, while bringing them closely to bear on one another. Many *magischer realismus* artists later experimented with de Chirico's mytho-Romantic geometry, a particularly striking example of which is Rudolph Schlichter's *Rooftop Studio* (1920) in which a strange assembly of figures are positioned around a draftsman's table. A 'new woman' with short hair, dressed in a flapper-style dress poses on a classical stone plinth, while another is transformed into a faceless mannequin in high-heeled boots and stockings. A marble, or wax, head and torso showing human organs rests on a pedestal, a nurse in white and a dark-clothed man wear gas masks, two men wearing top hats – one human, the other automaton- populate the small roof-top space. To the left of the picture the clean lines of town buildings form an extension of the static frame in which these

figures are encased. The scene is strange and uneasiness pervades the stillness, yet some elements are distinctly quotidian and familiar.



Figure 2: Pablo Picasso, Arlequin assis (Seated Harlequin: The Painter Jacinto Salvada), 1923, oil on canvas, 130x97 cm, Georges Pompidou Centre, Paris

The version of Picasso's *Harlequin* reproduced in *Nach-Expressionismus* is half-finished, with only the head and the left hand shoulder of the sitter coloured in. The drawing is detailed, with attention to the folds and shadows in the costume, but against the dark background the incompletely drawn figure becomes a strange apparition. Adding to this ghostliness, a cloud of white is left unpainted, or painted over, just behind the head, emphasising the detailed features of the face. The overall result is one of a penetrated reality in which the immaterial side of physical existence is revealed. Roh's inclusion of work by these two artists is revealing: together with paintings by Carlo Carrà (1881-1966), Joan Miró (1893-1983), Max Ernst, and André Derain (1880-1954), his examples go beyond German art, making *magischer realismus* even more difficult to define.

Elsewhere in Europe similar tendencies marking a shift from subjective to objective painting, and a revision of more classical and ancient styles abounded. These shifts were not exclusively towards calm and sobriety but also included more experimental and radical approaches to representing the exterior world. Raoul Hausmann called the new art a 'Return to Objectivity' (gegenständlichkeit) in the *Dada Almanac* of 1920; in 1926 Jean Cocteau demanded fewer words and greater clarity in poetry in his *Le Rappel à L'Ordre* [*The Call to Order*]; in the same year Virginia Woolf wrote about the new

cinematic medium: 'We see life as it is when we have no part in it. As we gaze we seem to be removed from the pettiness of actual existence.' (1996, 34); and in 1928 André Breton described the need for a radicalisation of objective art: 'there are also those things that I see differently from other people, and those things that I begin to see and that *are not visible*. And that is not all' (Breton [1928] 1968, 402-3). The resulting movements are testimony to the historical and social conditions of an era which swung between chaos and horror and relative stability and modernisation. Whilst the conditions and methodologies shared much, the resulting styles and creative output varied greatly.

ii. Expressionism – Emotion and Dynamism

An historical account of art necessarily assumes that there will be discrepancies and overlaps within movements and styles. Returning to *Nach-Expressionismus* it is also clear that Roh sees a cyclical, repetitious re-invention of past movements in all new art, but nevertheless commences his description of *magischer realismus* as the opposite, but not antithesis, of Expressionism. Roh dates the beginning of Expressionism to 1890, citing Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin as its foremost practitioners (1925, 3). The principle artists of the Expressionist period (Max Beckman, 1884-1950), Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), Ernst Kirchner (1880-1938), and Paul Klee (1879-1940)) painted in wildly disparate styles which collectively may not appear to be the sum of a particular movement. In fact, both Edvard Munch (1863-1938) and Otto Dix (1891-1969) – stylistically and geographically far apart – have both been described as Expressionist painters, the former as possibly pre-figuring the movement (his 1912 essay 'On the Spiritual in Art' was particularly influential), and the latter as an artist who bridged Expressionism and the later Neue Sachlichkeit. Shulamith Behr cites a range of artistic and cultural influences on the Expressionists – Baudelaire's poetry, Wagner's operatic theory, Romantic literature, and Kandinsky's ideas regarding mythology, and folklore – surmising that at the movement's theoretical heart is 'the paradox that the personal "strivings" and subjective expression of the artist could nonetheless rekindle utopian notions of spiritual community and identity' (1999, 9). Such grand utopian aims run contrary to how Roh conceived the modern world, and how he thought it should be represented.

In stylistic terms, Expressionist painting shows ‘an intense subjectivity which had no reluctance in destroying the conventional picture of reality in order that the expression be more powerful’ (Furness, 14). It is not concerned with the incidental minutiae of the everyday, but with prominent ‘modern’ themes such as the suffering, misery and shock associated with war, revolution and bourgeois rule. Landscapes are emotionally charged, depicted in provocative brush strokes and bold colour combinations that reveal the agitation felt by young artists at odds with the dominant social forces around them. The paradoxical desire for both individual control and submission to the divine powers of the universe is translated onto canvasses depicting human figures that act ‘as if they were marionettes of universal forces’ (Wolf 2004, 8). Expressionist painters characteristically use thick oil-based paint in bold colours accented with curving black lines and clouds of white *sfumato*². These colours have often been seen to convey emotion and for some act as a visual representation of sonic vibrations (epitomised by the linear and figural distortion in Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*, 1893). For Kandinsky, the exterior world reverberates with ‘inner sound’, a confusion of sensory experience which emerges in the interaction between the individual and nature, or the object. As Hugo Ball (1886-1927) elaborates, Kandinsky and the Expressionists ‘augment’ reality; they: ‘voluntarily abstain from representing natural objects - which seem to them to be the greatest of all distortions [...] They become creators of new natural entities that have no counterpart in the known world’ (Ball [1917] 1993, 264). Roger Cardinal also locates the power of Expressionist art in the exchange between individual and object, a transmission ‘*without delay or interruption*, of the vibrations he has absorbed from the object’ (1984, 119, original emphasis). The impression of instantaneity is, as Cardinal notes, not only the result of an emotive response, but also of experimentation with form that tends to emphasise the physicality of the painting process (29). The Expressionists eschew classical linearity, proportion and depth of field for shallow space in which apocalyptic visions burst before the viewer’s eyes (Ludwig Meidner’s *Apocalyptic Landscape*, 1913, is the apotheosis of such dramatic dystopian imagery). Emil Nolde’s (1867-1956) intensely coloured oil paintings of the early 1910s depicting Northern German coastal landscapes

² *Sfumato* is a mode of painting in which strong defined lines are erased in favour of softer, smoke-like translucency. It is also applied to German Expressionist cinema to describe the effect of heavy smoke and fog.

illustrate how in Expressionism ‘vision’ replaces ‘likeness’ (Vogt 1980, 56) In Nolde’s *Tugboat on the Elbe* (1910); *The Sea* (1913), water is depicted as a passionate force, and the surrounding landscape, devoid of figures or material objects, offers no realistic translation of spatial dimensions. Movement is conveyed through the contrasting hues of golden yellows, blackish-browns, inky blues and the curved and swirling eddies left by the brush in the oil paint. Nolde captures a convulsive, stirring nature that ‘in the passion of the creation, carried over into the picture something of the painter himself’ (Vogt 1980, 60).

In his description of Expressionist painting, Roh singles out Marc Chagall’s (1887-1985) work in particular as being indicative of the movement, noting the ‘grandiose chromatic storms’ and the dry flames of colour that burn in an ‘extraterrestrial world’ where animals walk in the sky and play instruments (1995, 17). His critique focuses on what he perceives to be a quasi-religious, heavily fantasised and symbolic rendering of the exterior world. In contrast he argues that in the ‘new’ painting the modern world re-emerges from the ‘shocking exoticism’ of Expressionist fantasies of hells, divinity and fire, as if ‘an insatiable love for terrestrial things and a delight in their fragmented and limited nature has reawakened’ (17). Cardinal suggests that Expressionism aimed at reforming ‘consciousness on the widest scale’, ensuring that painting represented and embraced ‘what it is to be alive’ (1984, 128). Roh is also enamoured of the drive to bring the hidden mysteries of the exterior world to consciousness; and some of his terminology and explanations overlap with those of Kandinsky or Nolde. However, he contrasts Expressionist force and spontaneity with magic realism’s calm, precise and detailed translations of modern experience. To illustrate this, Roh presents seven pairs of paintings, each pair bearing exactly the same title: the paintings on the left are Expressionistic, and those on the right exemplify the ‘new painting’. Most striking in these couplings is the leap from Robert Delaunay’s (1885-1941) *Welldstadt*, an aerial painting of Paris in which the buildings lean precariously in the manner of Paul Wegener’s Expressionistic film sets, to Paul Citroen’s (1896-1983) *Weltstadt* (1923) a photomontage in which the viewer is presented with tens of tiny photographs and illustrations of perfectly perpendicular city buildings, many taken from an aerial perspective. In the former brush strokes are clearly evident; depth and light are rendered in

imprecisely drawn clouds and shafts, whereas in the latter, the eye is confronted by precise lines and miniature detail that reveal the modern city crammed with architectural objects. In another pairing, the cubist geometry of Jean Metzinger's (1883-1956) *Stilleben auf rundem Tisch* [Still Life on a Round Table] (1916), contrasts starkly with the faithfully rendered everyday objects on Georg Schrimpf's (1889-1938) table. In Metzinger's painting there is no central focal point and the eye perceives the general thrust of abstracted objects, but in Schrimpf's still life every object demands equal scrutiny.

iii. Magsischer Realismus and Neue Sachlichkeit

Flicking through the pages of Roh's *Nach-Expressionismus*, one is struck by a number of similarities within what is a broad cross-section of early twentieth century European art, (the seven aforementioned pairs notwithstanding). Firstly, the paintings largely fall into the following subject areas: rural landscapes, still lifes (plants, fruit, household objects), portraits, sleeping figures and nudes. Next, there are stylistic overlaps, despite the range of artists, many of whose work has also been attributed to other movements. They are united by what Roh terms 'the rigorous dedication to the object' (1995, 27), with a tendency toward precise lines and shading and often an exaggerated foreshortening. Gone are the abstract shapes, wide brushstrokes, thick impasto and sensuality of Expressionism; they have been replaced by stillness, an 'airlessness' that focuses the gaze on the objects, rather than following '*wasted forces*' (1995, 18, emphasis in the original) of anxious movement or dynamism. Many of the landscapes depict the world at night, often with frontally lit sections bathed in an unnaturally bright moonlight. As Roh explains, these versions of the exterior world are cold, decanted, sober, flat and detailed. In Georg Scholz's (1890-1945) *Kakteen und Semaphore* [*Cacti and Semaphore*, aka *Cacti and Railroad Signal*], 1923 [Figure 3], for example, two clear light bulbs and seven pots of cacti of varying heights are presented on a plain wooden table. Depth of field is reduced between an open window behind the table and the objects upon it, resulting in a flattened perspective in which the objects appear both near and far simultaneously. The juxtaposition of three railroad signals 'outside' the window, the detail on the strangely shaped cacti, and two shining glass bulbs lack any suggestion of movement. The light gauze curtain to the left of the window appears as a smear

on the pain of glass, rather than as any indication of a breeze passing through the open window. The man-made railway signals and glass light bulbs jar seem at odds with the organic shapes of the desert plants, but the painting asserts the fact of their coexistence.



Figure 3: Georg Scholz, Kakteen und Semaphore [Cacti and Semaphore], 1923, oil on hardboard, 69x52.3 cm, Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster

If Roh's definition of *magischer realismus* had only contained the criteria for an objective, clear and precise 'realism' – everyday objects, modern environments, few religious themes, the work process effaced, 'airless' and unemotional, with what he terms 'centripetal' composition – then we would have difficulty distinguishing his mode from the concurrent Neue Sachlichkeit movement. However, there are several key elements to Roh's manifesto that account for a more mysterious, experimental and contradictory mode of painting which cannot be wholly subsumed by its contemporary counterpart. Neue Sachlichkeit was initially coined by professor of art and director of the Mannheim Kunsthalle in Munich, Gustav Hartlaub (1884-1963) serving as the title for an exhibition of paintings by several so-called 'new artists' which opened in June, 1925, the same year that Roh had written his essay. Hartlaub had sent out questionnaires to

artists and dealers requesting paintings to exhibit in his exhibition. He expressed these plans two years prior to the exhibition in a letter dated May 18 1923:

I am interested in bringing together representative works of those artists who in the past ten years have been neither impressionistically obscure, nor expressionistically abstract; neither purely externally sensual, nor purely internally constructive. I would like to show those artists who have remained, or have once again become true to, positive, tangible reality (Crockett 1999, 146).

In his account of events leading up to the exhibition, Dennis Crockett stresses the importance of art historians whose input helped to shape the exhibition. He situates Roh at the helm by citing his review in *Das Kunstblatt* for the Hans Goltz 'Neue Kunst' gallery exhibition (1922-23) in which Roh expresses the need for an exhibition to chart the Post-Expressionist movement in Europe: 'Such a show would be the most complicated, but most interesting undertaking known to the modern exhibition world.' (146)³ Hartlaub credited Roh with having joint creative responsibility for the exhibition, although it is Hartlaub's term *Neue Sachlichkeit* that has survived to describe this particular era of German painting. The exhibition displayed 124 works, by thirty two artists, all of whom (except three) were German.

Neue Sachlichkeit spans from 1919 to 1933 (when Third Reich censorship brought it to an abrupt end⁴), and for Hartlaub, was 'inextricably linked to the postrevolutionary, prestabilization inflation years' (1999, 158). It marks a period during which Germany was simultaneously desirous and fearful of a new modernity, and its politics have been widely debated. It has, for example, been

³ Crockett notes that Hartlaub corresponded directly with Roh regarding the exhibition, and artist Georg Schrimpf had also written to Roh asking him to organise an exhibition of 'Sachlichkeit', 1999, 150-151

⁴ Irene Guenther gives examples of how the Third Reich censored *Neue Sachlichkeit* artists 'The left-wing political artists, and, of course all Jewish artists were particular targets of Nazi cultural cleansing (Guenther, *Magic Realism, New Objectivity, and the Arts during the Weimar Republic* 1995).

Numerous painters, including Max Beckmann, Max Ernst, Otto Dix, and George Grosz were denounced as 'bolshevists' or '*kunstwerge*' (art dwarfs) by the Reichskulturkammer (Third Reich's Chamber of Culture), headed by Joseph Goebbels. Often prohibited from painting and fired from teaching positions, their works were destroyed or displayed for ridicule in vicious '*Entartete Kunst*' (Degenerate Art) shows or *Schandausstellungen* (Abomination Exhibitions). Hartlaub was fired from his job as museum director in Mannheim. Roh, accused of being a "cultural bolshevist" was taken to the Dachau concentration camp in 1933' (Guenther 1995, 55). A few artists' national landscapes (Schrimpf and Carl Grossberg) proved exceptions and were deemed acceptable to German national pride' (55).

argued that Neue Sachlichkeit managed to achieve a critical distance from the dominant social values of Weimar culture, as Paul Wood argues: 'Neue Sachlichkeit represented an attitude of alienation from the actual lived reality. It was here that its critical charge lay [...] in this sense of distance and in the despair that frequently followed' (Fer et al. 1993, 295). In a 1929 letter, Hartlaub writes of Neue Sachlichkeit in 'negative' and 'positive' terms, avoiding any definite political allegiance: 'Cynicism and resignation are the negative side of Neue Sachlichkeit; on the positive side we are dealing with an interest in immediate experience and in taking things entirely objectively' (Crockett 1999, 158). However, the exhibition included the work of artists such as George Grosz and Otto Dix, who had formerly been involved with the Berlin Dada group, artists who represented modernity's ugliness, disease, war-related traumas and consumerism. Indeed for some (Willet 1978, 11), the critical vision in Neue Sachlichkeit comes directly from Dada's unrelentingly bleak, violent and often ironic representations. Although the works exhibited by these artists had been carefully selected by Hartlaub to avoid scandal (Dix's 'sex murder' paintings were not included), both Grosz and Dix were already widely known for their political imagery and social commentary and thus the label of Neue Sachlichkeit took on some of these implications. Although the movement presented a new vision of reality, it came to be associated most often with a certain style of portrayal- a 'grating ugliness' or an eerie airlessness – which suggests a 'conception of realism more as a question of an effect than as an intrinsic characteristic of the ways realities are pictured.' (Hemingway 2007, 119) Hartlaub desired to present the unifying characteristics of the new tendency, yet proceeded to define Neue Sachlichkeit as having a right (neo-classicist) wing and a left (Verist) wing. The classicist style demonstrates a search for what Hartlaub called 'the *timelessly* valid object', a realisation of 'the eternally valid laws of existence' ([1925] quoted in Kaes 1995, 492). Artists such as Georg Schrimpf (1889-1938), Alexander Kanoldt (1881-1939) and Georg Scholz are associated with cool, calm precision and classical lines in their often idyllic landscapes and still life paintings. Contrastively, Verist artists, such as Grosz and Dix, uncover the violent, unpleasant and frightening side of modern social experience, described by Hartlaub as 'tearing things out from the world of real events' with the urgency and heat of Expressionism but with a detailed and penetrating focus rather than

abstraction (1993, 292). But no sooner does Hartlaub distinguish these two ‘wings’, than he admits the imprecision of any attempts to describe the new art as separate groups or styles, and cautions against an overreliance on artistic concepts that may overshadow the paintings. It should also be noted that the influence of metaphysical and classical painting of the Neue Sachlichkeit style was evident in both strands regardless of motif and political persuasion. Ultimately, Hartlaub, like Roh, determines the new art as a united struggle to make sense of a changing, war-riven society by representing ‘the new, the unspoken’ aspects (1995, 292).

Roh, although he continued to use his own term *magischer realismus*, was aware of the wider application of Hartlaub’s Neue Sachlichkeit following the success of the Mannheim exhibition. In his study of German art during this period, Shearer West looks at the two art historians’ usage of the term Neue Sachlichkeit. He explains ‘sachlichkeit’ as a word which ‘signals an objective fact, as opposed to a tangible object’ (2000, 160). Whereas Hartlaub used this term to talk about the new painting, Roh (according to West) used a slightly different version of ‘objectivity’ in his mother tongue, ‘*gegenstandlichkeit*’ from ‘*gegenstand*’ which literally means physical object. Therefore, Roh emphasises the physical objects more than the facticity of truthful depiction. The movement, then, was initially tied to the representation of physicality, and later shifted, focusing on an approach to the mysteries of existence through objects. Artists looked beneath the rubble, the fragmented communities and torn bodies for what lay underneath. Despite the attempts of various critics to account for splinter groups within Neue Sachlichkeit, and claims that Roh’s *magischer realismus* omits the more overtly political Verism exemplified in the work of Dix and Grosz in favour of the neo-classical, pastoral idyll within Neue Sachlichkeit⁵, Roh, while mindful of the geographical and stylistic divisions, insists on the commonalities; as his inclusion of two paintings by Grosz in *Nach-Expressionismus* illustrates [see appendix ii:2].

For Roh the paintings of *magischer realismus* confront reality, and the role of the object in these is above all to shift the viewer’s perspective. He argues that

⁵ Wieland Schmied, *Neue Sachlichkeit in Deutschland 1918-1933*, 1969, p. 31, quoted in Menton, 1986.

although artists such as Grosz, Dix and Christian Schad reveal the horrors of the world with the intention to shock, their detailed socio-political paintings illustrate the 'intimacy of everyday life' nonetheless (1995, 29). The patchwork-face of a disfigured soldier in Dix's *Skin Graft* (1924), or the grotesquely caricatured features of prostitutes in Schad and Dix's paintings of the Berlin underworld, reveal aspects of life as strange and uncanny as the murderous dreams depicted in Heinrich Davrinhausen's *The Dreamer II* (1919) or the folk pastoral of Walter Spies' *Departure* (1921) (the latter of which was extolled by Roh in *Nach-Expressionismus* for its magic realism). What unites all the paintings is the way in which the object is drawn and positioned to question its status as a real object.

Re-visiting and dissecting the aim of *Nach-Expressionismus* years later in his book-length study *German Art of the Twentieth Century*, Roh clarifies that with the term *magischer realismus* he desired to reach further than the parameters of Neue Sachlichkeit, which, with hindsight, 'was aimed in quite a different direction, seeking an approach to the autonomous sharpness of objects' (1968, 113). He argues that his mode has more subtleties than that of Neue Sachlichkeit, allowing for the affect of the painting to be defined in less rigid terms. He explains that the paintings evoke:

feeling existence, making it stand out from the void; that a solidly modelled figure crystalizes itself, as if by a miracle, emerging from the most obscure source. Here, perhaps, the background is the last frontier, absolute nothingness, absolute death, from which something emerges and vibrates with energetic intensity. This seems to be a more important viewpoint than the 'objectivity' everyone keeps evoking. The latter doesn't acknowledge that radiation of magic, that spirituality, that lugubrious quality throbbing in the best works of the new mode, along with their coldness and apparent sobriety (1995, 20).

That the new style of painting had a 'greater respect for reality' than its Expressionist predecessors is crucial to Roh. Once the objects and figures, the landscapes and geometrically produced scenes are presented in all their concrete objectivity, a metamorphosis in perception occurs as hyperreal details, canted perspective, gigantic or miniature proportions, and stark contrasts between dark and white, precise detail, expressionistic touches and modern and ancient

imagery emerge. The ‘crystallising’ moment for Roh is when the viewer momentarily pinpoints the tension between the objects, and between the background and the objects. The effect of stillness in the paintings gradually transforms into what he describes as the throbbing, explosive sensation of movement as the viewer scrutinises the weird familiarity in front of him/her. As Misch Orend writes in 1928: ‘the deadest, most useless thing is capable of suddenly emanating this great force lying within it, of making it palpable’ (1994, 494). The ‘radiation of magic’ to take Roh’s hyperbolic phrase, is not a spiritual experience in a religious sense (he is at pains to clarify this) but a visual alchemy in which stylistic effect reveals the hidden, non-objective elements of life ‘miraculously’ through the solid forms of objects. In the interpenetration of subject and object ‘something emerges and vibrates with energetic intensity’ straddling the chasm between nature and emotion, the animate and inanimate, and the social and individual. As will become evident, this ‘something’ is an inherent feature of magic realism in all its guises.

Created in a period in which the technical advances in artistic and commercial production begun in the preceding century were coming to fruition, early twentieth century art is unsurprisingly focused on the border between the real and the unreal. What is distinctive about Roh’s criticism is that he, unlike Hartlaub, embraces experimentation with a particular interest in how the material of the medium contributes to the effect of reality on canvas, photographic paper, or, later, celluloid. He is also interested in how, in the manner of de Chirico, the poles of mimetic and imaginative realism can be reversed. In *Nach-Expressionismus* Roh admires the painting process of Georg Schrimpf (1889 - 1938), who paints detailed landscapes in his studio without ever going outside or working from a sketch or model. Schrimpf’s attention to detail, nonetheless, reproduces landscapes from his imagination that could be confused with real ones and which to Roh exemplify the mode of *magischer realismus*: ‘Only when the creative process achieves its goal from the inside out can it generate new views of reality, which is at most built in pieces, never imitated as a whole’ (1995, 25). In contrast to Grosz’s comment above that soul and psychology should be erased from painting, Roh asserts that the artist should apply inner spirituality to the exterior world. However, for the viewer, the object

world also provides the catalyst for inner contemplation. In his descriptions of magic realism Roh often switches between ‘inside-out’ and ‘outside-in’; each is essential to his theorisation of a convergence or an interpenetration of mind and matter that is evoked and provoked in the paintings.

Exactly what Roh means by the word ‘spirituality’ when he describes the atmospheric tendency that stirs in Post-Expressionist painting is fundamental to an understanding of *magischer realismus*. Firstly he asserts that magic, or the wonder of matter, is not meant ‘in the religious-psychological sense of ethnology’ (1968, 112); neither is it purely fantastic. Rather, it belongs to the object world spanning psychic and physical experience: ‘Humanity seems destined to oscillate forever between devotion to the world of dreams and adherence to the world of reality. And really, if this breathing rhythm of history were to cease, it might signal the death of the spirit’ (1995, 17). He describes how in the modern epoch style and process tended to eclipse objectivity, but obsessive objectivity – as in what he later came to regard as overt stylisation in some Neue Sachlichkeit works – could also seal the object off from the exterior world due to the discipline and rationality emphasised in its depiction. In a Post-World War I Europe, during a spell of relative security and increased industrial and technological production, Roh reminds us that ‘Einstein admitted that the most exciting thing we can experience is acquaintance with the mystical’ (1968, 12). His definition does not originate in the religious concept of the divine outside ‘real’ experience, but emerges in the relations between inner and outer worlds. Roh’s use of the words ‘magic’, ‘mystery’, ‘wonder’, ‘spirit’, all amount to the same conceptualisation of an inner reality made visible through art.

In the frontispiece to the first edition of *Nach-Expressionismus*, Roh leaves another clue in the form of Henri ‘Le Douanier’ Rousseau’s (1844-1910) oil painting *La Bohémienne Endormie* [*The Sleeping Gypsy*] (1897).



Figure 4: Henri Rousseau, *La Bohémienne Endormie*, 1897, oil on canvas, 129.5 x 200.7 cm. Gift of Mrs. Simon Guggenheim to the Museum of Modern Art, New York

It depicts a nocturnal desert scene, in which a recumbent female figure sleeps peacefully under a bright moon, a walking stick in her hand suggesting a tiring journey. A lion stands motionless contemplating her. The improbability of the scenario suggests that the lion is an apparition, or a manifestation from her unconscious dream world. Roh 'realized the importance of Henri Rousseau's naive, neoprimitivist influence within magic realism' in terms of the remote, mythical elements, the 'airlessness' and his 'strong sense of reality'⁶ (Menton 1983, 18). In an analysis of *The Sleeping Gypsy* Roh praises the magical effect of the picture whereby the dark blue-green night and the brilliance of the sand dunes are constrained into a uniform substance under the light of the moon, to which the uncanny presence of the lion adds a mythical element (1925, 125, my translation). The tension that is created between the still peacefulness and the odd intrusion reflects a 'poetic approach' to reality rooted in an imagined scenario: 'Rousseau, who had never travelled in his life [...painted] completely convincing landscapes which were in fact purely imaginary' (Raynal 1950, 26).

⁶ Guillaume Apollinaire was, like Roh, struck by the marked realism of Rousseau's work and the painter's predilection for blurring the distinctions between what was real and what was imaginary, see 'The Douanier' (*Les Soirées de Paris*, January 15) in Apollinaire, *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews 1902-1918*, Leroy C. Breunig (ed.), trans. by Susan Suleiman, London: Thames and Hudson, 1972, p.349

To my mind, there is one artist, not originally included in *Nach-Expressionismus* or in Hartlaub's original exhibition, but later singled out by Roh as a significant Post-Expressionist, in whose paintings the metaphysical and magical 'spirituality' of de Chirico and Rousseau are transformed through the weird quotidian 'sobriety' of Neue Sachlichkeit into *magischer realismus*. In his paintings, classicist, Romantic, Verist, 'primitivist', and Surrealist inflections can be traced, and his art is truly emblematic of magic realism's strange, engaging polyvalence. Franz Radziwill (1895-1983), born in Strohausen, Germany, produced over 800 paintings which span in style from Expressionism to Surrealism. His paintings of the Post-Expressionist period draw on key thematic elements: modern technology and transportation, nocturnal landscapes, rural architecture and unpopulated space. Taking the stillness and ordered geometry of de Chirico's classical motifs and unpopulated squares, and the weird, lyrical quasi-narrative tendency produced in Rousseau's remote dreamworlds, Radziwill renders ordinary rural and city locations mysterious. The linear non-abstracted 'traceless' technique of Neue Sachlichkeit, a compositional arrangement that hints at narrative structure, an uncanny 'weirdness' heightened by unexpected reversals in colour and brightness and a pervasive dream-like quality contribute to his magic realism. In particular the ordinariness of uniform red brick buildings is transformed by the unnaturally bright light of his nocturnal vistas. Roh notes Radziwill's unusual colour combinations and detail, adding that 'The silence of the grave dominates his miniaturelike pictures, in which strange events are always taking place against a darkling sky' (1968, 117). Of significance here is the mention of 'events' rather than of objects, underscoring the compositional dynamism of elements brought together within the frame and the subjective interpretation process undertaken by the viewer.

The most famous of Radziwill's paintings *Todessturz Karl Buchstätters*, [The Fatal Crash of Karl Buchstätter, 1928] [Figure 5] depicts the scene of an aeroplane crash witnessed by the artist in 1911 close to Bremen airfield, where he grew up. Against the black night sky, a small seaside village is illuminated, almost unnaturally, by the light of the moon. The detailed brickwork (Radziwill trained as a bricklayer) is a common feature in his paintings, documenting the rural architecture of the period, and juxtaposed with images of modern transportation

and communication that suggest the wider-reaching social reality of Germany at large.



Figure 5: Franz Radziwill, Todessturz Karl Buchstätters, [The Fatal Crash of Karl Buchstätter], 1928, oil on canvas on masonite, 90 x 95 cm, Museum Folkwang, Essen

The bright white paint used to highlight the level crossing bars, the sea, the leaded window frame and guttering of the guard tower, lends a ghostly effect and ‘lugubrious quality’ to the scene. Radziwill employs a glaze technique that deepens dark colours and makes white highlights seem unnaturally luminous. It allows light to play with the surface of the painting which can bring movement to the natural phenomena depicted, providing finer contrasts between shades and light than paint alone. There is an eerie, glasslike clarity and stillness in the painting’s suspension of causality. The plane, frozen in its plunge towards the unsuspecting village, is divested of any movement, and yet the title combined with the overly steep angle of the descent suggests otherwise. The viewer holds her breath, also suspended in a crystallised point in time awaiting the moment that will never come. The initial sense of calm is undermined by this tension, and the twin poles of the crossing gate seem to come to life in a sinisterly defensive

gesture. The tension exists because we expect death and because the plane seems alien – it should not be there, that was not its course.

By contrast, the figure standing by the crossing is unaware. In his monograph on the artist (the sole book-length study of Radziwill available in English) James Van Dyke gives an analysis of the painting that adds a further melancholy narrative dimension. He interprets the figure as an organ-grinder: 'At the center of Radziwill's painting, the peasant, the key figure of romanticizing visions of premodern society and stability, gives way to the organ-grinder, a figure associated with urban life and often with poverty' (2011, 60). If we accept this reading of the figure, the village, by extension, is further imbued with issues relating to wider social conditions in the city. This wandering street entertainer, recalls the main protagonist of Alfred Döblin's (1878 – 1957) 1929 novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Franz Biberkopf, whose continual hustling and extended experience of unstable living conditions betray the tensions and inequalities of the modern urban experience. In other interpretations of Radziwill's painting, art historians link the 'fatal dive' to the legend of Icarus (Michalski, 1999; Van Dyke, 2011) and even suggest that the composition was inspired by Dutch Renaissance painter Pieter Breugel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (1558), (Menton 1983), a pastoral scene in which bright illumination of salient elements guides the viewer's apprehension of the objects as in Radziwill's painting. In his portrayal of Buchstätter 'as a modern Icarus, Radziwill referred to a story that was not only a warning but also a tale of desire and daring, of an effort to escape tyranny and transcend limitations.' (Van Dyke 62-63) Van Dyke's analysis extends the analogy to consider how Radziwill's oft-assumed critiques of modern life may be as much a celebration of the forces of technology as a criticism. In many of his paintings aeroplanes, sea-planes, boats, and trains function as points of departure and expansion; the sea and the darkened expanse of the nocturnal skies provide a sense of limitlessness within which both nightmare and utopia are possible.

Radziwill's political persuasion, like that of most of the Neue Sachlichkeit artists, has been avidly discussed in relation to Third Reich censorship of so-called 'degenerate art' (Roh 1968; Guenther 1995; Van Dyke 2011), but the art remains as testament to a period of European history in which the boundary between what seemed real and plausible and that which seemed unreal and

incomprehensible was torn to shreds. Art historian Sergiusz Michalski has said that ‘there is no security for humankind to be found in Radziwill’s world’ (156); and Van Dyke’s monograph concludes with the assertion that the artist was an ordinary man defined by popular culture and attempting to make sense of its mysteries (170). The realism that is conveyed in his paintings is far from mimetic, and stems from subjective experience - the persistent, traumatic memory of Buchstätter’s tragic accident. Radziwill himself said that ‘Reality represents the greatest miracle imaginable. I had to capture this realization, which I felt rather than knew, in pictures’ (Michalski 157). Through a controlled dynamism of perspectival transformation Radziwill creates ontological uncertainty. The places and the events depicted in his work are real and testify to a socio-political awareness, and yet he succeeds in creating versions of an exterior reality in which the unconscious, uncanny, and uncertain throw these realities into question.

Despite his rejection of Expressionist defamiliarisation in a move towards the hyperrealism and mimetic reproduction characteristic of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, Roh’s emphasis on the ‘interior figure’ of the exterior world, keeps *magischer realismus* from being subsumed by Hartlaub’s categorisation. However, I would argue that in Roh’s attempt to make his mark on 1920s art history he was overly hasty in dismissing the larger Surrealist movement as being more concerned with fantastic reality and oneirism. For me, the key problem with *Nach-Expressionismus* (and the most significant for any study of the wider cinematic mode of magic realism), is that Roh’s expression of the mode is deliberately disassociated from French Surrealism, and yet uses a great deal of the same rhetoric and lexicon. For example, he employs central ideas from Freud’s 1919 essay *Das Unheimliche* [The Uncanny] to make his point about the subjective, hidden, unconscious elements of objective reality, and the movement that occurs between subjective and objective states of being. Breton’s *First Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924) attests to his and his colleagues’ fascination with Freud’s writing on the unconscious. And de Chirico, whose work inspired Roh’s *magischer realismus* and Surrealists such as Breton, Ernst and Magritte, wrote in his essay on metaphysical art published in *Valori Plastici* (Rome, 1919) words that reached and spoke to artists and art historians of both modes:

Psychically speaking, the fact of discovering the mysterious aspects of objects could be described as a symptom of cerebral abnormality akin to certain forms of madness. I believe that every person can undergo such abnormal moments, and that this is all the more fruitful when made manifest in an individual gifted with creative talent and clairvoyance. Art is the fatal net that catches these strange moments in flight, like mysterious butterflies, unnoticed by the innocence and distraction of ordinary men (de Chirico, *On Metaphysical Art* [Sull'Arte Metafisica] 1971, 87).

In his retrospective appraisal of Surrealism (1956), Theodor Adorno forms an argument that can be appropriated to give insight into Roh's reluctance to embrace either Hartlaub's or Breton's manifestos for modern art. Adorno, rejecting *Neue Sachlichkeit's* censorial sobriety argues that:

Childhood images of the modern era are the quintessence of what the *Neue Sachlichkeit* makes taboo because it reminds it of its own object-like nature and its inability to cope with the fact that its rationality remains irrational. Surrealism gathers up the things the *Neue Sachlichkeit* denies to human beings; the distortions attest to the violence that prohibition has done to the objects of desire (Adorno 2004, 231).

While *magischer realismus* painting (excluding the politically motivated paintings of Grosz and Dix) does not offer the level of distortion of physical form that Surrealist art does, it certainly does court the irrational. The object worlds that Roh describes depicted in paintings such as those created by Franz Radziwill, are not so much distortions as metamorphic shifts, but shifts which nonetheless, I believe, have more in common with Surrealism than with *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

iv. The role of Freud's uncanny in critical readings of magsicher realismus

In responses to a retrospective of Radziwill's work, in Hamburg, in 1930, 'a mysterious superreality' was noted in his work, which could only be grasped through an understanding of the mysteries of colour (Van Dyke, 3). Similarly, Roh found his paintings uncanny. This relates both to stylistic qualities (colour combinations, hyperbolically emphasised details, flattened visual plane, and distorted perspective) and to a narrative element – a recounting of historical and social memory. In order to fully understand this term and the implications it has for magical realist painting, it is necessary to briefly look at Freud's 1919 essay 'The Uncanny', and also his work on psychoanalysis in art.

Freud incorporates over forty literary texts into his essays on the uncanny, working with characterisation and reader responses to a largely gothic oeuvre. It is his assertion that our repressed desires are responsible for the strange familiarity of certain experiences or motifs: 'The uncanny arises when the boundary between Fantasy and reality is blurred.' ([1919] 2003, 150) Freud's primary interest in the uncanny relates to fantasies that animate dreams and creative works, and how they correspond to wish fulfilment and memory in individual subjects. He begins by outlining the compulsion he felt to write about aesthetics and the 'qualities of feeling' that they produce (2003, 123). He divides the essay into three parts; firstly focusing on the etymology of the German words *heimlich/unheimlich*, then on the impressions and mental processes tied to a sense of the uncanny in works of literature and in everyday occurrences and concluding with reflections on a combination of both. In the former part, Freud provides an extensive list of definitions for *heimlich* or homeliness, a history of various linguistically determined applications, some of which converge with its antonym, *unheimlich*. Tracing the definitions in the German Dictionary of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (1877), 'heimlich becomes unheimlich', retaining both the familiar/comfortable and the concealed/hidden/strange: 'Starting from the homely and domestic, there is a further development towards the notion of something removed from the eyes of strangers, hidden, secret' (2003, 133). In his essay Freud describes how the same object can take on simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar aspects. He concludes that all definitions lead to a version of the Uncanny in which a forbidden emotional impulse is converted into fear by being repressed. Whether the emotional impulse derives from a childhood trauma, 'the narcissistic overrating of one's own mental processes' (2003, 147) sexual anxiety or desire, the eerie sense of the uncanny is a result of the process of repression followed by return. Freud argues that the strongest sense of the uncanny occurs when something that is not part of conscious everyday lives suddenly appears in front of us, by whatever coincidence or timing, and seems familiar. He interprets the conviction 'I know this place, I've been here before' as a recognition of the womb or the mother's genitals, the place of everyone's birth. Thus a large proportion of his theory is devoted to the uncovering of sexually attributed neurosis.

The second part of the 1919 essay is an analysis of *The Sandman* (1816), a short story by E.T.A. Hoffmann, whom Freud describes as ‘the unrivalled master of the uncanny in literature’ (2003, 141). As in Freud’s ‘re-telling’ of his personal experiences of the uncanny, Hoffman foregrounds uncertainty. The tale is driven by a chain of real and imagined events experienced by the protagonist Nathaniel as he attempts to free himself from the figure of the sandman who first appeared in his childhood. Hoffmann sets the scene by giving the reader access to Nathaniel’s thoughts in his letters, where he writes of a ‘deadly impression’ of something terrible that has been imprinted on his brain: ‘Dark presentiments of a dreadful fate hover over me like black clouds impenetrable to any friendly ray of sunlight’ ([1816] 2004, 85).

The figure of the sandman becomes vivid for Nathaniel after his mother recounts the terrible tale of a monster that blinds children and takes them to his nest to have their eyes pecked out. Knowing the story to be inconceivable, Nathaniel nevertheless continues to brood upon it: ‘never could I accustom myself to the uncanny ghost: the image of the cruel sandman never grew paler within me’ (88) and he begins to believe that his father is somehow inextricably linked to this monster. The heavy footsteps of his father’s late night visitor are revealed to be those of his ‘repulsive’ associate Coppelius, whom Nathaniel witnesses holding a pair of burning tongs and crying ‘Eyes, bring eyes’. When Nathaniel later witnesses his dead father, whom he believes to have been killed by this evil man, he is overcome by the need for revenge. The love and revulsion felt by Nathaniel towards his father, is, according to Freud, a reaction to his duality as the ‘father-*imago*’ (2004 footnote II, 161) or the split beneficent/punitive (father/Coppelius), the ego ideal and super ego. Nathaniel wishes Coppelius dead, but instead the good father dies.

As a young student Nathaniel falls in love with Olympia, the beautiful ‘daughter’ of Professor Spalanzani, whom he fails to realise is a mechanical doll. Freud explains her as ‘a materialization of Nathaniel’s feminine attitude to his father in his early childhood.’ (2004, 160) The young man’s narcissistic love prevents him from reciprocating that of a real woman, his fiancée Clara. Olympia seems very agreeable but she is cold to the touch, and can only answer in the monosyllabic refrain of ‘Ah, ah, ah’. Nathaniel’s friends cannot ‘fathom’ her, but he is

completely infatuated, loving her 'blindly'. When an accident in Spalanzi's workshop causes Nathaniel to witness an uncanny second death, in which Olympia loses her glass eyes, he stands 'numb with horror. He had seen all too clearly that Olympia's deathly-white face possessed no eyes: where the eyes should have been, there were only pits of blackness – she was a lifeless doll' (Hoffman 119-20). Spalanzi cries that such convincing work had taken twenty years (equivalent to bringing a daughter to her coming of age) and strangely informs Nathaniel that her eyes had in fact been 'purloined' from him. Freud takes this bizarre turn of events and uses it to assert his theory that Olympia is 'a complex that has been detached from Nathaniel and now confronts him as a person' (2003, 161).

The personification of the repressed complex, Hoffman's strategic uncovering of these layers of sexual and social identity, and the strange 'coincidences' in naming and doubling, produce a sensation of the uncanny, of ordinary lives that become questionably real.

Freud, however, concedes that this chain of oedipal anxiety is not the only means of evoking a sense of the uncanny in the text and reflects on the idea that the impression of the uncanny may rest in our distinction between animate and inanimate objects. The automated doll is icy cold to the touch, and has been concealed all her life by her father, yet Nathaniel who finds her beautiful, is seduced by her uncanny appeal. Inversely, Nathaniel's eventual madness racks his body with physical convulsions that, like a form of St Vitus Dance, make his movements seem technical and demonic. Freud's essay is convoluted, and does not settle on a consistent definition of the uncanny and its effects, and the wealth of literary examples and the lists of caveats and disclaimers are typical of his work on aesthetics. Nevertheless, the uncanny remains one of the most frequently used terms with which to describe sensations of fear, thrilling and chilling imagery, strangeness, marginality and horror in literature, art and film. We 'awake' from our interaction with these works of art with a 'lasting sense of reality' (Freud [1918] 1990, 263).

Freud's commentary on the uncanny reveals a fundamental correlation between subjectivity and socio-historical currents. Throughout the modernist avant-garde,

there is a tendency to foreground technology's role in narrowing the gap between inanimate and animate objects. *Magischer realismus*, taking cues from de Chirico, stretches from Grosz's automata, through the cold doll-like figures of Anton Räderscheidt (1892 – 1970) in *Nude on Parallel Bars* (1925), to the still lifes of Schrimpf, Radziwill, Kanoldt, in which the solid shapes of utilitarian objects and the irregularities of botanical and natural phenomena are subtly animated through a dynamic of compositional contrasts. Human figures take on the geometrical composition of modern architecture; objects undergo a transformation under the imagined focus of a microscope or an alchemical photographic processing. Roh's 'spiritual' reading of these ontological worlds can be interpreted as an analysis of their technological and psychological composition. While he largely attributes the effect of the post-war dissemination of Freud's works to the Surrealist propensity to mine the unconscious for imagery, his own description of *magischer realismus* as the pictorial representation of 'the interior figure of the exterior world' seems distinctly Freudian. As Freud asserts, the artist is, in part, a magician, who by visually representing mental life produces an organisation and reasoning of 'the nature of things' (Freud 2008, 105).

The psychological process of repression is evident in both fantasy and the uncanny, and yet their respective manifestation in cultural production differs. The uncanny is inherent to the relationship that bridges our dreams and our daily apprehension of exterior reality; it resides in faint impressions, the sense of déjà vu, or an irrational fear. Certainly for Roh uncanniness is linked to emotion and atmosphere. Fantasy is also rooted in the everyday, but has typically found expression – in literature, in painting, in film- in modified externalisations of internal processes, and is often depicted in the form of symbolic or hyperbolically fetishized objects (the monstrous props belonging to the horror genre, or the dystopian wastelands of early science fiction comic books). Tzvetan Todorov gives a clear account of the difference between the two. Beginning with the fantastic he explains how an event may occur which cannot be explained by the laws of the world familiar to us (the existence of devils and vampires, for example), and describes two possible solutions:

Either the devil is an illusion, an imaginary being; or else he really exists, precisely like other living beings - with this reservation, that we encounter him infrequently. The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighbouring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous' (1975, 125).

When we experience the realm of the fantastic, we hesitate and attempt to reconcile the supernatural phenomena with our own knowledge and experience of the world and ultimately suspend our disbelief. The uncanny, or the magical real, on the other hand, may also cause hesitation and momentary disbelief, but is ultimately reconciled with reality. When the fantastic is spoken of in terms of magic realism, it is often due to a slip of terminology in which, more often than not, what is meant is the uncanny, or the Rohian magical. Wendy Faris raises a significant point regarding the relationship between magic and real elements in magic realist works that is relevant here. She argues that what often creates the ambiguity - or for our argument concerning *magischer realismus*, the tension - is a reversal whereby the magical, uncanny, strange elements become factual and the historical context or background detail seems unreal or impossible. A mythical Icarus, for example, can seem more real than the weirdly lit cluster of buildings in *Karl Buchstätter*: 'the irreducible details of magical realism can lead in the opposite direction, signaling that this may be imaginary' (Faris 2004, 14). There is also confusion between material and psychical reality in which the boundaries blur into one another.

In 1964, Psychoanalytic theorists Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis set out three phenomena (or realities) within Freud's theories: 'material reality, the reality of intermediate thoughts or of the psychological field, and the reality of the unconscious wishes and their "truest shape": fantasy' ([1964] 1986, 8). These versions of reality range from the objective reality of material things, through reflective thought and quotidian patterns of subjective thought, to a fantastic rendering of unconscious thoughts and desires. Freud asserts that material and psychic (in particular, unconscious) reality must not be confused or conflated; after all, psychoanalysis is designed to uncover the links between them. Magic realist works appear to suspend these three aspects of reality in a constant state of tension that ultimately encourages the spectator to contemplate the mysterious

nature of life itself and re-evaluate what constitutes ‘real’ experience. *Magischer realismus* differs from the fantastic stories of E.T.A. Hoffmann, but it is not difficult to see how confusion between magic and fantasy arises when one considers the following quote from *The Sandman*: ‘Perhaps you will then come to believe, o reader, that there is nothing more marvellous or madder than real life, and that all the poet could do was to catch this as a dark reflexion is caught in a dull mirror.’ (Hoffmann 101) The new realism as conceived by Roh was not only about the ‘wonder of matter’ (1968, 112), but became increasingly about how these ideas were captured and developed, and as the 1920s progressed, he became more interested in artists that were pushing the boundaries of painterly expression.

v. Max Ernst, Magic Realist?

Returning to *Nach-Expressionismus* and the distinction between Roh’s mode and Hartlaub’s movement, it is significant to note that critics of magic realism often fail to engage with Roh’s inclusion of two of Max Ernst’s works in the plate reproductions at the end of the book. Ernst contributed to both Dada and Surrealist movements, and like many of the magical realists, was greatly influenced by de Chirico’s *pittura metafisica*. In fact, Ernst’s discovery of de Chirico reads like an episode in Freud’s explanation of *unheimliche/heimlich*, an awakening of something long dormant: ‘I had the feeling of rediscovering something which I had long been familiar with, as when an event already seen opens up an entire region of our personal world of dreams, a world that due to a kind of censorship we had not seen or not allowed ourselves to see.’⁷ Why did Roh choose to include Ernst in his list of magic realists, knowing of his involvement with these other movements, particularly Surrealism, which he regarded to be ‘driven by purely individualistic fantasy’ (Roh 1968 [1958], 139). He certainly felt a connection with Ernst’s German roots and during his *magischer realismus* and *Foto Auge* periods, the two men corresponded both professionally and as friends. It seems highly probable that Roh was searching for an artist whose work could serve as accompaniment to his own shifting dialogue on the production of art. I find it likely that Ernst’s involvement with Dada, Surrealism,

⁷ Max Ernst, taken from Notes por une biographie’, quoted in Werner Spies, *Max Ernst Collages: The Invention of the Surrealist Universe*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1991 [1988], 48

and his inventiveness with various methods of transcribing reality through paint, transfer, tracing, pasting, cutting, erasing, struck a chord with Roh, who was also trying to record the fantastic potential of reality released from the repressed. Despite the breadth and lack of focus in *Nach-Expressionismus*, in which the referenced art works seem bent to fit Roh's thesis, there emerges a theme (rather than a movement) that parallels the underlying dynamism and drive of Ernst's work taken in its totality. Reading between the lines, Ernst's work seems to have signalled to Roh the metamorphosis in perception that he so desired to articulate, whereas in contrast, he considered Dada and Surrealism to be movements in which actual transformation of the objects themselves through 'tumultuous' interjections (129) took the place of a more subtle psychological metamorphosis.

Perhaps a less confusing way for Roh to have proceeded would have been to have engaged with Surrealism at a deeper level before dismissing it based on his reading of Breton's *First Manifesto*, and thus to have engaged with Ernst's definition of Surrealism. Unfortunately we can only retrospectively apply Ernst's words to Roh's, but in so doing the intersection of magic realism and Surrealism, their coterminability is marked. In Ernst's essay 'Was ist Surrealismus?' [What is Surrealism?], 1934, he stresses that Surrealism's exploration of the relationship between interior and exterior reality offer for him a sense of freedom:

So when the Surrealists are said to be painters of a continually mutable dream-reality, this should not be taken to mean that they simply paint their dreams ... It means that they move freely, daringly, and naturally on the physically and mentally quite real ("surreal"), if still largely undefined, frontier between interior and exterior world, registering what they see and experience there, and intervening where their revolutionary instincts suggest.⁸

Ernst's definition of Surrealist practice is a compatible companion to Roh's manifesto of magic realism, each covering similar ground in that they highlight the importance of dynamic movement between the object world and imagination.

⁸ Max Ernst, taken from 'Was ist Surrealismus?', Exhibition Catalogue, Zurich 1934, trans. from the German by John W. Gabriel and quoted in Werner 'Directions for Use' forward to *Max Ernst Life and Work: An Autobiographical Collage*, Werner Spies (ed.) Cologne: Thames and Hudson, 2006, 121

Art historian Werner Spies asserts that although Ernst's oeuvre displays the impulses of various artistic modes of expression (Dada, Surrealism, *pittura metafisica*), the 'processing of his seminal material made it his own ... its lasting influence lies in its underlying principle of a structuring of freedom' (1991, 248). For Roh, Ernst exemplifies an unchained freedom of representation that constantly evolves – a new realism beset with questions and mystery. As will be explored below, Ernst's work marks a significant point of overlap between *magischer realismus* and the wider European avant-garde, specifically Surrealism, but also, (more significantly for cinematic magic realism) between Roh's later work on photography and avant-garde film.

Born in Brühl, Ernst studied philosophy before turning to art and literary pursuits, becoming one of the founding members of the Cologne Dada group⁹ (1919-1922). The group's collaborative textual and visual collages, along with Ernst's individual pieces, caught Roh's attention. He writes of the short-lived 'spoof' element of the Cologne Dada, and its witty 'abbreviations' of modern life, but also notes how photomontage and collage replicates the 'feeling that our existence is a contradictory assemblage of compartments forcibly joined together with the joints showing' (1968, 131). The Dada legacy is never far from Roh's thoughts regarding *magischer realismus* (and will be discussed in further detail below). Through Ernst's individual works Roh traces a metamorphosis whereby the visible joins and deliberate clash of materials characteristic of early Dada collage and photomontage are gradually smoothed and effaced. The first of Ernst's pictures in *Nach-Expressionismus* is *La belle jardinière* [The Beautiful Gardener, 1923]¹⁰ an oil painting on canvas with additional line drawing. It is an example of Ernst's 'overpaintings' in which he bases drawings on earlier collage works, or alters existing paintings, creating 'palimpsests that recorded resolutions of contradictions' (Spies 1988, 55-57).

9 Beginning with their publication *Der Ventilator* in 1918, Ernst and Johannes Theodor Baargeld (1882-1927) built up the Cologne chapter of European Dada, forging links with Hans Arp, Tristan Tzara, and later with André Breton in Paris when Ernst moved to the city in 1922.

10 The original collage *santa conversazione* was made by Ernst in 1921, and was followed by an ink line drawing traced directly from the collage bearing the same title as the painting reproduced in *Nachexpressionismus: La belle jardinière*. Reproductions can be found in Spies, 1991, figures 175 and 176.

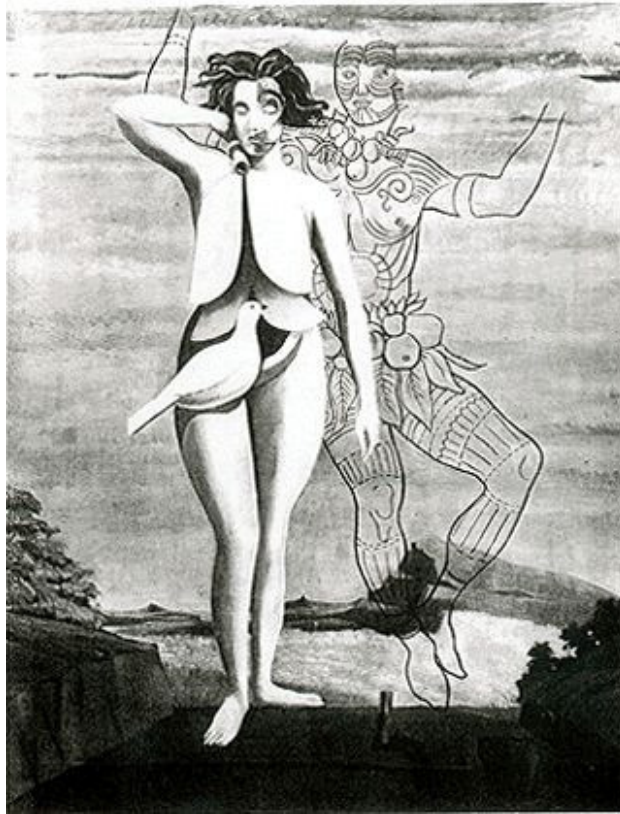


Figure 6: Max Ernst, *La belle jardinière* [The Beautiful Gardener], 1923, oil on canvas, (whereabouts unknown)

The background is a painted landscape of a view facing outwards across the sea from a strange 'jetty'. At the edge of the 'jetty', half balanced on the sea itself, a woman is poised naked, save for a propeller/tail fin held over her chest and a white bird that has settled on her right thigh, covering her genitalia. A little chiaroscuro gives the body some depth, but the overall impression is of a flat image pasted onto the background. Behind her, 'floating' in the sky, is a line drawing of a figure through which the background can be seen, with bodily markings and garlands of fruit tied about the torso and neck. Roh's accompanying text reads as follows:

Max Ernst. The torso opened for inspection; the fantastic configuration of the nude, half-bird, half-propellor; the weblike figure attached to the woman like a shadow - all these are reverberations of Dada, to whose phantasms Max Ernst, seemingly a Hieronymous Bosch reborn, remains faithful. But in addition, this young Parisian painter (a Rhineland boy sitting in India at the moment) reveals new, classical traits; in the present case, the slender elongation of the nude above a tranquil, natural landscape (1925, 7; English translation in Spies 1991, 124).

Roh is conscious that the Lower Rhine region ‘produced’ Bosch and Ernst, whom he also draws together because of his perception of their shared commitment to the bizarre in times of social upheaval (1968, 138). But he also notes something of the cool classicism in Ernst’s work – in the statue-like figure, the flattened, stuck-on body parts, and the still landscape - for which he is making a case in *Nach-Expressionismus*. In this reading of the painting, I believe Roh is referring to de Chirico’s revised classicism - the melancholy stillness and the presence of Renaissance-style perspective in the landscape – for there is nothing of the classical nude in this reconstructed

The second of Ernst’s works is taken from *Les maleurs des immortels*¹¹, which Roh keeps as the title rather than its actual title *la parole – femme-oiseau* [The Word – She-Bird, 1921]. This collage takes a female nude and a monstrous male figure, whose musculature is revealed from head to toe, and sets them against a white background. The male figure has been split in half with a front and a back view held together by a white strip through which the skeleton is revealed. The female figure is headless, the right leg ‘cut’ to reveal the blood vessels beneath, and birds peek between her legs and under her arm in front of her breasts. Viewed all at once these elements seem monstrous: the interior has been exteriorised, skin and head removed, and the figures appear disjointed and inhuman, frozen during a horrible metamorphosis.

¹¹ This is the title of a book written by Paul Eluard and Max Ernst in Paris, 1922.

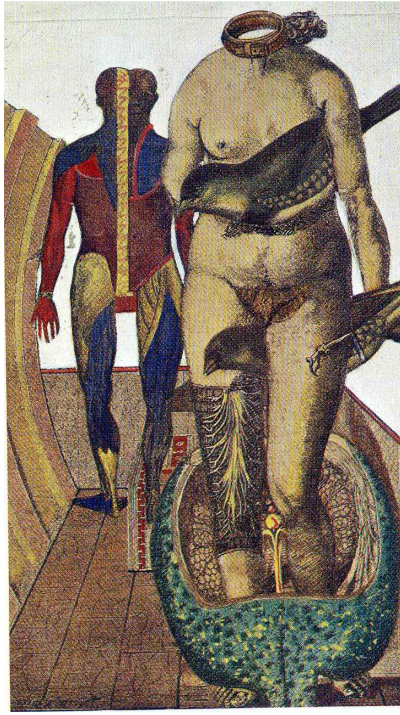


Figure 7: Max Ernst, *la parole* (also known as *femme-oiseau*) [The Word – She-Bird], 1921, collage and gouache, 18.5x10.6 cm.. Gallery Le Bateau Lavoir, Paris

And yet the anatomical detailing of the bodies is chillingly real. Roh describes it as a 'print [that] evinces passages of detailed reality drawn with the most exquisite care while simultaneously maintaining the highest level of fantasy' (1926, 130, English translation in Spies, 77). To this Spies responds, noting the confusion that Ernst's work notoriously posed for art historians: 'This [Roh's] praise verges on the ridiculous when you consider that the headless woman in the foreground was lifted from a Dürer etching' (77). Although Roh may not have known the sources and materials used in each of these collages, Ernst's creative process and his apprehension of the modern world fascinated him, particularly the artist's ability to imbue phantom figures with 'organic life'. Despite the contrast between the spectral and the living, they seem to draw together, the unexpected inhabiting the quotidian. Citing a letter he received from Ernst in 1926, Roh illustrates with the artist's own words how his 'montages' form a pictorial narrative:

It meant less to me to construct new entities than to create electric and erotic tensions by relating elements which until now we have felt were alien and unconnected. This resulted in explosions and high voltage, and the more unexpected the associations (...) the more surprising was the flashing spark of poetry (Ernst to Roh, quoted in Roh 1958, 139-140, Roh's ellipsis).

Although in his initial *schema* Roh pits Expressionist dynamism against the static, airlessness of *magischer realismus* this is not to say that the latter lacks dynamism; it is of an entirely different kind. Ernst suggests that the unexpected meeting of unlikely elements is akin to electric tension, creating explosive sparks, an analogy famously reiterated by Breton who also wrote about Ernst's collages¹² Elza Adamowicz identifies the difference between the material effect of the words and images in Surrealist collage and the affect resulting from its dialectical structure¹³. She describes how Surrealist collage is 'a creative act of *détournement*' (of turning the image or the word against itself, of re-imagining and re-using materials) but also a '*dépaysement*', a defamiliarisation that enables an encounter with the marvellous. In Surrealist collage, exterior reality and the marvellous exist in a symbiotic relationship that does not stray into the realm of the purely fantastical: 'Collage effectively anchors surrealist activities in the real, thanks to the "reality effect" of its processes, which unmask, critique and renew the perception of utilitarian reality and modes of representation and expression' (Adamowicz 2005, 11). Roh was impressed by Ernst's technical ability to create a 'comprehensive order' out of heterogeneous fragments, and his comments also illustrate how fantastical elements – anthropomorphosis, the meeting of scientific and ancient symbols, abstraction – become plausible in his figures: 'creatures which remind us of ourselves but have insect eyes and bird feathers' (1958, 139).

In his essay 'Beyond Painting', Ernst describes a metamorphosis in perception that takes place when he scrutinises a patch of wallpaper, or stares at an object: 'a mosque in place of a factory, a drummers' school conducted by angels; carriages on the highways of the skies; a salon at the bottom of a lake; monsters, mysteries, a vaudeville poster raising horrors before my eyes.' (2009, 20-21) There is, within this procedure, a structured intention, even though the result is left to chance. Roh believed that the Surrealist movement staged extreme interventions in order

¹² See André Breton, 'Max Ernst' reprinted in *Les Pas Perdus*, (1924), trans. by Mark Polizzotti, 1964, pp.60-61

¹³ In her introduction to Surrealist collage, Adamowicz contrasts Louis Aragon's response to the semiotic and linguistic aspects of Ernst's textual and image-based collage, and his appreciation of the parodic re-use of mimetic representation to subvert meaning, with Breton's subjective reaction to the *merveilleux*, the 'spark' and electrical charge within which the distinction between the real and the marvellous is kept in a state of perpetual tension. For Aragon, Ernst points to gaps between the real and the artificial, whereas for Breton the gap is suspended and the two become inseparable. See Elza Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse*, 2005, 4-5

to ‘smash our existing world’ to transform perceptions far beyond the effects of *magischer realismus*: ‘The ordinary things of life were bewitched; constellations, ideas of space and the function of gravity were transformed. Without this transformation we are still in the realm of Magic Realism.’ (1958, 137) And yet Ernst’s ‘magical sophisms’ (2009, 21), along with the paintings of Magritte (1938), retain for Roh a level of recognisable reality.¹⁴ Roh’s clear respect for Ernst’s believable magic rests with the art historian’s subjective response – an alchemical reaction between viewer and canvas. But it should be noted that in order for Roh to extol Ernst as a magic realist, (and later as an exemplary practitioner of ‘marvelous’ technical innovation), he needed to read the artist’s work against Dada and Surrealism, extracting only that which fit his hypothesis. Like his ideas throughout *Nach-Expressionismus*, Roh’s reading of Ernst is paradoxical, but in its selective heterogeneity it unwittingly welds together the overlapping approaches to interior and exterior reality found in critical writing on both magic realism and Surrealism. Thus from the very outset, magic realism shared, in part, a Surrealist methodology and aesthetic.

vi. Film und Foto: ‘Unexpected Life’ and the role of the camera

‘Next to a new world of objects we find *the old seen anew*’ Franz Roh, *Foto-Auge*, 1929.

‘Just one of its features – the range of infinitely subtle gradations of light and dark that capture the phenomenon of light in what seems to be an almost immaterial radiance – would suffice to establish a new kind of visual power’ László Moholy-Nagy ‘Unprecedented Photography’, 1927.

¹⁴ He also praises Ernst’s later paintings (with particular mention to his 1953 work *Father Rhine*) in which the microscopic and macroscopic elements ‘exist in a state of tension with one another’ (Roh, 141), which is, as we know, a key characteristic of *magischer realismus*.



Figure 8: Original programme for the Stuttgart Film und Foto Exhibition, 1929

Roh's definition of a new mode of painting (posited between 1919 and 1933) addressed a change in representation during the Weimar period, claiming that the artistic rendering of the objective world had shifted from the religious and transcendental themes of the recent past towards the representation of an earth-bound wonder in nature and things, tied to a *secular* spirituality. The mysterious qualities of these Post-Expressionist paintings undermine what is often an initial impression of order and tranquillity. In his original text of 1925, Roh emphasises the dialectical structure of *magischer realismus* as a dynamic intensification of the exterior world, the continual back and forth between a faithful depiction and an imaginative reinvention of the object: 'As long as Post-Expressionism works with this dialectic, it will be open to a thousand spiritual possibilities' (1995, 25).

Roh's secular 'spiritualism' corresponds to a definition of magic that is starting to shift.

This section investigates Roh's ideas as they progress through the 1920s and into the early 1930s as the new technologies of representation in photography and film influence his analysis. The first section compares various art historical perspectives on the new media and modernity in order to better demonstrate the

nature of his theories. Roh's 1925 exploration of the new spirit in German art does not cite examples of photography or film as *magischer realismus*, with the study mainly confined to painting save for Ernst's collage, and Citroen's photocollage. However, Roh is keen to keep abreast of experimental and avant-garde movements and the new practices of 'recording reality' that had begun in the previous century and were now more widely available. Throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, and in addition to his work as a lecturer, art historian and curator, Roh, inspired by Ernst, and by his friend the Hungarian born László Moholy-Nagy, makes a foray into the art world with his own photographic experiments, delighting 'equally in the object and the experiment' (Heckert 2006, 4). Combining theory and practice, he develops an analysis of the magical which extends from photomontage to photography and film. These later articles (written between 1929 and 1931) embrace the kinds of avant-gardist experimentation with form that moves away from 'faithful' or mimetic representation, (particularly the techniques of Surrealist photomontage and photograph) and demonstrate Roh's curator's eye for bringing diverse perspectives of the object – including the popular and mass-produced – together. He continues to assert that artistic renditions of objective reality should reveal their unexpected or unimagined aspects, and must thus combine clarity of representation with unusual perspectives and *transformation* of form. This objective is exemplified, and will be examined, in the 1929 *Film und Foto* exhibition, for which Roh contributed an accompanying photobook and filmmaker Hans Richter curated a film programme.

During the Weimar years themes of art and the apparatus, the lens and the realm of the optical, imitation and interpretation, were dissected by critics and historians. Roh's most influential contributions to these debates were photo-essays¹⁵ combining critical commentary with carefully collated photographs. For

¹⁵ In his article "Agriculture, Industry, and the Birth of the Photo-Essay in the Late Weimar Republic", Michael Jennings describes a new 'genre' of photography books that were not collections of photographs set next to text interpreting them, but were collections "arranged in discursive and often polemical order" (p. 23). Roh and Tschichold's *Foto-Auge*, as well as Alfred Renger-Patzsch's *The World is Beautiful*, and August Sander's *Face of Our Time*, are found by Jennings to mark a shift in the publishing of photographic works. They combine polemical arguments about the medium of photography, its role in society and the question of mass (re)production with the photographs themselves – which were presented carefully to create contrasts or similarities that created a more subversive or analytical thematic than earlier

Roh, the transition from painting to film (a path which he discusses in this later writing) was facilitated by his own artistic forays into photomontage and photography, where he continued to test his theories of the psycho-spiritual object against concurrent debates. One of his works (a photographic composition of nine negative prints) is displayed alongside the photographic work of artists he admired, such as Ernst, Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy, in the most cited of his publications on photography: the anthology *Foto-auge: 76 Fotos der Zeit* [Photo-eye: 76 Photos of the Age].

It has been suggested that Roh's initial interest in the medium was stimulated by Moholy-Nagy's views on the experimental and social aim of photography, and that he was directly responsible for Roh's foray into practical experimentation.¹⁶ There are many similarities in their work, commencing with the layout of their photo-essays, in which the commentary is separated from the image. The images in *Foto-Auge* are presented in what appears to be a very calculated series of pairings (although not subject to any hierarchy based upon chronology, artist, nationality, or subject) and the sequence is not punctuated by any text, save for the name of the artist and the title. This repeats, and is most likely inspired by, Moholy-Nagy's insistence on *visual* meaning in his book *Painting, Photography, Film* [1925]. There he writes 'I have placed the illustrative material separately following the text because continuity in the illustrations will make the problems raised in the text VISUALLY clear' ([1925] 1969, 47, original emphasis). Roh followed Moholy-Nagy's work closely, and often acknowledged his criticism as well as his mastery of photography. (1930, 7) He was particularly taken with Moholy-Nagy's unusual use of perspective and manipulation of light. In 1930, after having written a considerable number of articles about the Hungarian, Roh published sixty of his photographs, introducing the reader to their 'magic', 'intensification', 'weird shadows', 'limitlessness', and 'phantastic [or ghostly] forms' (*geisternde*). He also adhered closely to Moholy-Nagy's definition of the

photography books that relied on a mutual context such as exotic locations or transportation. October 93, Summer 2000, 23-56

¹⁶ Roh was in correspondence with Moholy-Nagy (an archive of his correspondence with various artists from 1911-1965 is kept at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles), and several critics have inferred that Roh's interest in photography and the photo essay was at the persuasion of Moholy-Nagy. See <http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artMakerDetails?maker=1479&page=1> (accessed 15/12/11) and Witkovsky, 2007, *Foto: Modernity in Central Europe, 1918-1945*, two citations of the Hungarian artist's influence on Roh's progression to the photographic media.

camera as a supplement to the human eye, and to his explanation of the ‘kinetic’ composition of the photograph which requires engagement beyond mere recognition of the object or scene represented. Moholy-Nagy distinguishes between photographs created as travel documents, advertisements or scientific illustrations and conceptual photography, whose optical distortions and the ‘impulse of time’ were often mistakenly identified as ‘faulty’:

the secret of their effect is that the photographic camera reproduces the purely optical image and therefore shows the optically true distortions, deformations, foreshortenings, etc., whereas the eye together with our intellectual experience, supplements perceived optical phenomena by means of association and formally and spatially creates a conceptual image (Moholy-Nagy 1925, 28).

For Roh, these mistakes are part of the fantastic potential that the medium provides for seeing the world anew.

Moholy-Nagy’s earlier work saw him experiment with the photogram, or as he called it ‘photoplastics’, whereby an object is placed on the surface of photosensitive paper and exposed momentarily to light. A chemical fixative is then applied to the paper, resulting in a shadow image. Variations in the light refraction and the concentration of the chemicals make the results subject to chance. Photograms, as made famous by Man Ray’s (1890-1976) rayograms, following Christian Schad’s (1894-1982) schadographs, do not document the object, but rather reveal the unseen aspects of its apparent solidity. Surrealist poet Robert Desnos (1900-1945) recalling Man Ray’s experimentation with handprints on citrus paper, describes the images in his photograms as foreign planets and landscapes that reveal ‘something’ unexpected: ‘here the miracle allows itself to be captured without resistance and something else, besides, leaves its anguishing thumbprint on the revelatory paper’ (Desnos [1929], quoted in Phillips 1989, 8-9). Artists often made photograms using glass or smoke to investigate the mysterious translucency of solid objects and the indeterminate distance between them. The photosensitive paper registers indexical traces of the objects and captures their spectral relations.

Jan Tschichold describes Man Ray’s rayograms as a ‘modern poetry of form’ in which the photogram is to documentary photographs what poetry is to everyday

conversation (Tschichold [1928], 1989, 124). Moholy-Nagy, too, used the photogram as a form of condensation, to represent ideas rather than to mimetically reproduce a clear version of an object. This poetic shorthand, or condensation, it should be noted, is something that Jameson is later to ascribe to cinematic magic realism. Rather than simply representing an abstraction of form utilising light and spatial arrangement, the photogram maintains the shape of the original object but also records its secret life in translucent blurs and shadowy, soft lines. Moholy-Nagy was interested in the interpenetration of the object and the exterior world, of that which is visible and invisible. Touching upon a later-developed theme in magical realism, he stresses that the art of the photogram should testify to a convergence of differing forms and temporalities: ‘The effect of photoplastics derives from the penetration and blending of things that are inherent though not always visible in life, the visual perception of the simultaneity of events.’ (Moholy-Nagy, [1928], 1985, 304) Roh included two of Man Ray’s rayograms in *Foto-Auge*. Against black backgrounds the edges of the objects vary between the blurry and the sharply outlined. A skeletal fan, two ‘gloves’ floating, their stark outline recalling the eerie chalked outlines of bodies long since taken to the morgue, and the bright halo of a lamp, overlap the grainier, cloudier images. Man Ray famously argued that ‘no plastic expression can ever be more than a residue of an experience’ (Man Ray, ‘The Age of Light’ [1934], quoted in Phillips 1989, 53) and this idea is clearly visualised in his rayograms. Commenting on the process of his work and the affect it produces in him, he writes of the marvellous augmentation of optic vision by the camera: ‘I have tried to capture those visions that twilight, or too much light, or their own fleetingness, or the slowness of our ocular apparatus rob our senses of. I have always been surprised, often charmed, sometimes literally “enraptured” (Man Ray, ‘Deceiving Appearances’ [1926], quoted in Phillips 1989, 12). Abstraction of form is a key element of the pictures in *Foto-Auge*, but unlike in Expressionist paintings, the strange worlds are created in the interaction between the original object and the photographic process. Roh’s primary interest seems to be in the mystery that is evoked in these encounters of ‘facts’, and he uses a similar vocabulary to describe the suggested movement (seemingly receding *and* moving towards the spectator) to that in *magischer realismus*: ‘that through convergence an optic semblance of space ... can suggest the most distant distance as well as

plastic closeness' (1974, 16). Again, it is significant that the thrust of Roh's analysis has already been articulated by a Surrealist, here Man Ray, whose choice of the words 'enraptured', 'twilight' and 'fleeting' accompany his practical experiments. The surprise and charm that Man Ray finds evident in his photograms correspond to the unknown and hidden aspects of reality that the eye alone is unable to record. Roh's theory of a doubly augmented reality – through the technical apparatus and then through the senses – seems indebted to the Surrealist *merveilleux* – in which the contingent, ephemeral and unconscious aspects of the real are brought to the fore.

vii. The Dada Legacy

Roh's correspondence with the pioneers of the German avant-garde influenced his later work significantly, and his correspondence and collaboration with Moholy-Nagy, Ernst, and Tschichold resulted in traces of Bauhaus, Dada, and Surrealism being incorporated into his own terminology and aesthetic. As the 1920s progress, Roh's stringent *schema* of 1925 loosen, and he underscores the 'communication' between avant-garde movements rather than delimiting *magischer realismus* through them. In *German Painting in the Twentieth Century*, Roh's 'Dadaism' chapter provides a detour from the painting-focused retrospective. He focuses mainly on the 'plastic tension' and diverse materials of Raoul Hausmann's, Kurt Schwitters', George Grosz's and Max Ernst's collage-based works, (anachronistically – for a mode set firmly in the 1920s and 1930s, selecting Ernst's *Grasshoppers' Song to the Moon* (1953) as the first illustrative plate for the section on Post Expressionism) (1968, 79). He situates Dada as a link between Italian Futurism (which he dates from 1909) and Surrealism, noting how it extends 'far beyond French Cubism' (81). Distinguishing Dada collage from the Cubists' *papiers collés*, which favoured a 'stuck on' approach to collage, and also from the more radical work of Berlin Dadaists Richard Hülsenbeck (1892-1974), Hannah Hoch (1889-1978) and John Heartfield (1891-1968), Roh asserts his own definition of the movement, ultimately privileging the poetic and 'intellectual content' of photomontage above the more political montages. Of particular note to our discussion is how he considers the 'demolishment of form' and 'chaotic whirl' of early Dada photomontage, to have given way to 'an almost classic moderation and calm' (1968, 17). As before with his analysis of Ernst's *La*

belle jardinière in *Nach-Expressionismus*, the dynamic movement that he perceives is suggested in the contemplative juxtaposition of elements that hark back to his reading of ‘calm’ in de Chirico. Roh was, despite his avant-garde credentials in championing Ernst, anything but a radical. His interest in collage and photomontage was also due to its recycling of fragments of the past. As pastiche, Roh admired collage because he did not wish to fully relinquish the art historical past in favour of complete restoration (1968, 113).

In Germany artists Dix and Grosz, who had already portrayed the senseless destruction of the human body in their post-war paintings, and other young students back from the frontline made it their goal to regenerate German art (centred mainly in Berlin and Cologne). In the catalogue that accompanied the Dada Fair in 1920 (*Erste Internationale Dada-Messe*), artist Wieland Herzfelde proclaimed that these works of art ‘proceed from the requirement to further the disfiguration of the contemporary world, which already finds itself in a state of disintegration, of metamorphosis’ (Herzfelde quoted in Witkovsky [1918] 2003, 102). Two years earlier Raoul Hausmann had spoken about Dada photomontage in the astronomical terms that Roh often uses to describe the magical opportunities of objects, claiming them to be ‘miraculous constellations in real material’ (Hausmann [1918] 1982, 16). Roh echoes this in his description of ‘the crystal-hard ... starry miniature world of *Dada-merica*’, Grosz and Heartfield’s famous 1919 photomontage. Whilst this art is, to use Roh’s words, ‘non-objective’ in the sense that it does not record a complete view of physical reality, it has an ‘object-fantasticity’ [*gegenstandsfantastik*] (1979, 18), because the combination of elements creates dynamism. Ades describes the ‘hallucinatory landscapes’ crafted by the Dadaists (Ades 1976, 107), but Roh’s analysis of photomontage is, like his definition of magic realism, one of opposing contrasts: classically static yet with a demonic effect (1929, 18) It is in the ‘plastic tension’ (16) between the layers of images in the photomontage that a metamorphosis occurs and the spectator views the world anew. Photomontage disrupts and fractures, making the objective world appear less real and less familiar to the spectator. The medium became synonymous with Dada (although is not exclusive to it) and its attempts to comment on and parody the effects of war and modern politics in Germany. As Dawn Ades explains, the Berlin Dadaists ‘used the photograph as a ready-made

image' along with newspaper and magazine cuttings, illustrations, drawing and various other printed materials (1974, 7). Roh was not interested in the materials themselves (as his failure to mention the source material for *La belle jardinière* indicates), nor in disruption as a political message, but he was concerned with the representation of socio-historic time. He praises Schwitters' rendering of 'The perishable aspect of broken-down, decrepit forms of being', finding in his sculptures and collages a 'sense of historic time' (1968, 133). He also commends Hausmann's 'abbreviated method of composition' in his retrospective of German art. Once again returning to a concept familiar in *Nach-Expressionismus*, Roh finds in Hausmann's work 'an expression of the feeling that that our existence is a contradictory assemblage of compartments forcibly joined together with the joints showing' (131). The chaos and provocation that Ades describes in Dada photomontage is somewhat watered down in Roh's explanation. His is a more sensory, subjective reading of Dada as social pastiche, a commentary on modern social life that prioritises affect above all.

The invention of photomontage is claimed by Hausmann, Hoch, Grosz and Heartfield within the Dada movement¹⁷ (Ades 1975, 10). However, the art of photomontage as an aesthetic, not a political, process began with the invention of photography itself and the accidental effects that occurred in the developing and processing stages. Ades' *Photomontage* includes, for example, Eugene Atget's photographs in which reflections in Parisian shop windows create the effect of a double image. Part of the attraction of the photomontage for Roh was the combination of carefully planned composition (exemplified in Ernst's seamless collages in *Une Semaine de Bonte* [A Week of Kindness], 1933, for example) with the contingent elements fused in the encounter of apparatus and material. Although it is chaotic and disruptive, and often designed (certainly by Dadaists) to shock, thereby disrupting ontological certainty, it is also a careful reconstruction of the physical world, ordered with intent by the artist.

This later phase in Roh's work continues to expand upon the mode of *magischer realismus* and the contrasting pull between the real and the imaginary; but rather

¹⁷ A footnote in *Foto-Auge* clearly states Grosz's opinion on this matter, who in a letter to Roh wrote: 'Yes! You are right. Heartfield and I had already in 1915 made interesting photo-pasting-montage experiments.' (Roh, 1974, 18)

than drawing up a table of oppositional criteria as he did for painting, he incorporates a wider range of experimental ideas and techniques circulating in the German avant-garde and other European art movements. Unlike the glazed yellows and 'darkling' skies of the paintings he once favoured, photographic prints and film images adopt a monochromatic spectrum of 'sublime possibilities of gradation between the poles black and white' (1974, 17) that seem to him as magical.

viii. The New Photography: Roh's *Foto-Auge* [*Photo-Eye*]

1929 was a significant year for photography, with many avant-garde artists publishing statements on its qualities and potential. It was also the year that photography first became a taught course at the Bauhaus under the tutelage of Moholy-Nagy. This section will consider the simultaneous emergence of ideas about temporality, the commodity, reproduction and objectivity in both the avant-garde and in modern 'mass' culture, or 'vernacular' modernism¹⁸, which brings the cinematic medium into our discussion. In 1929, painter Salvador Dalí expressed an interest in photography that parallels Roh's: 'From the subtlety of aquariums to the swiftest and most fleeting motions of wild beasts, photography offers us a thousand fragmentary images that come together in a dramatized cognitive whole' (Philips 1989, 35). Dalí could have been describing the collection of pictures in Roh's book of the same year. Co-edited by Roh and Jan Tschichold *Foto-Auge* was published in 1929 to coincide with the prominent *Film und Foto* exhibition, organised by the Deutscher Werkbund and initially held in Stuttgart from May 18 to July 7, before travelling to other parts of Europe. The Deutsche Werkbund, according to Beaumont Newhall, allegedly 'sought for the reconciliation of art and technology' and wanted to approach the 'problem' of photography (Newhall, [1977], quoted in Mellor 1978, 77). Combined with Roh's enthusiasm for the photographic medium, Tschichold's background as a graphic designer and typographer ensured that the book fit stylistically with modern design trends. The entirety of the textual commentary is printed in

¹⁸ The term vernacular is used by Miriam Hansen to discuss shifts and new modes within modern culture that became inseparable from the new way in which art was produced, transmitted and articulated. It 'combines the dimension of the quotidian of everyday usage, with connotations of discourse, idiom, and dialect, with circulation, promiscuity, and translatability.' "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism", 2000, in Gledhill and Williams, *Reinventing Film Studies*, 2000, 333

lower case, in keeping with the Bauhaus assertion that a word does not need two alphabets to represent it, and with Roh's dislike of the 'gothic' *Fraktur* font that was used for the majority of German texts. The choice of font, *Akzidenz*, a nineteenth century sans serif was deemed by the pair to be more '*sachlich*' and appropriate to a book focused on objectivity (Hollis 2006, 44). The book's design underscores the repetition and shared thematic concerns in the pictures, but also juxtaposes the incongruous in its double page pairings. On the cover is El Lissitzky's (1890–1941) photomontage *selbstbildnis* [Self Portrait], also known as *der konstrukteur* [*The Constructor*] (1924). Lissitzky, a lecturer in architecture, was also a designer, typographer, photographer and painter who arrived in Berlin from Russia in 1921. There he met Kurt Schwitters and Moholy-Nagy, the latter forming the connection to Roh.

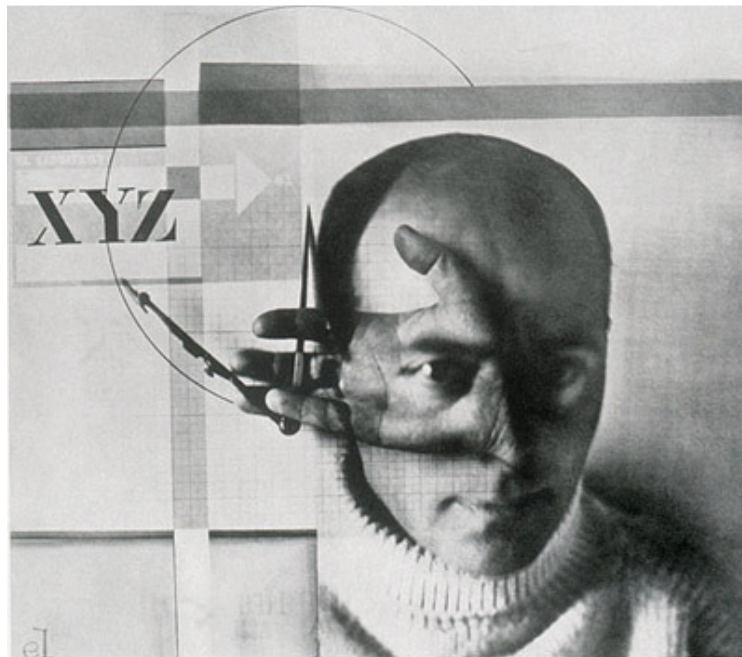


Figure 9: Lissitzky, *selbstbildnis - der konstrukteur* [*Self Portrait -The Constructor*], 1924, published in *Foto-Auge*, 1929

Roh takes Lissitzky's photomontage *The Constructor* as the entry point to the *Foto-Auge* collection because it spells out precisely the message of the book. In this picture, Lissitzky combines a photographic self-portrait with a superimposed image of a hand layered on top of the face, an image of a draughtsman's compass, geometrical line drawings, typography, and graph paper. Lissitzky's eye stares out from the hand, blending vision and production. The combination of so many artistic processes and references to different modes of measuring and

calculating states the intent to scrutinise knowledge. The mechanical process is at the centre of Lissitzky's photomontage, and similarly is at the heart of Roh's *Foto-Auge*. Yet mechanics, cool detachment and objectivity form only part of Roh's analysis. As can be seen in *The Conductor*, 'the hints of the failure of rationality within the image: the grid's lack of registration, the jagged pockets of darkness and variable focus that disrupt the clarity of the surface' (Dickerman, in Perloff and Reed 2003, 154) are also suggestive of irrationality and disruption.

Foto-Auge's 76 images reveal to the spectator the breadth of Roh's knowledge of modern photography, and his passion for the camera. Thematically it covers three aspects of the medium that were important to Roh: the historical, the technical and the extraordinary possibility of a new vision. This collection of 'five kinds of applied photography' – the reality-photo, the photogram, photomontage, photo with etching or painting, and photos in connections with typography – provides a historical background to the techniques and experimentation that he was subsequently to adopt in his own practice. The images fall into many categories: some are works of art, others documentary reportage or evidence from historical or criminal archives, others have been taken from catalogues, manuals or posters and others are meteorological or botanical photographs. *Foto-Auge* was published as one of 'the first polemically constructed photographic arguments in the history of the medium' (Jennings 2000, 23), taking the social and technological debates circulating in the art world, and addressing them directly through the images themselves, without relying on text to act as interpretation.

In his introduction, the essay 'mechanismus und ausdrück: wesen und wert der fotografie' [mechanism and expression: the essence and value of photography], Roh's approach is historical, and, as in his earlier critical writing, attempts to encapsulate the trends and arguments into a multifaceted vision of 'new' art. For example, it is well known that negative printing was used in early photography, (as early as the 1880s, Witkovsky 2007), and this, along with other stylistic nods to the past (Roh often rounded the corners of his photographs before mounting, for example) became part of the modernist re-evaluation of the medium. Roh cites the Daguerreotype (the first permanent plate photograph which characteristically reproduced an exact, laterally reversed print of a scene) as the

‘beginning’ of the development of photography, placing the photographs that he has selected for *Foto-Auge* at its ‘end’. Therefore, Roh urges the reader to receive the collection of photographs not as a completely new departure, but as a stage within the development of the medium, a medium that from the outset sought to bring a new impulse to the arts, which Daguerre explains is: ‘not merely an instrument which serves to draw Nature; on the contrary it is a chemical and physical process which gives her the power to reproduce herself’ (quoted in Trachtenberg, 1980, 13).

The first image in *Foto-Auge* is Eugène Atget’s (1857–1927) photograph of corsets displayed in a Paris shop window (1927), an example of the mundane transformed by the camera into the uncanny: the white mannequins seem to float against the blackened background, trapped within the clear frame of the window – a blurry white veil hovers by the door captured by a lens using a slow shutter speed to allow for a longer exposure to light. Harnessing technology to produce a visual image of even the slightest movement allows Atget to render visible ephemeral moments of chance, which enhance his portrait of a city in transition. His project to photograph the disappearing ‘old’ Paris and document it for posterity began at the end of the nineteenth century. I find it significant that Roh starts his sequence of pictures with Atget’s photograph, because Breton and Man Ray had already appropriated the photographer’s work for *La Révolution Surréaliste* in 1926. Walter Benjamin cites Atget’s Parisian photographs as the ‘forerunners’ of Surrealist photography: ‘He was the first to disinfect the stifling atmosphere generated by conventional portrait photography in the age of decline [...] It is in these achievements that surrealist photography sets the scene for a salutary estrangement between man and his surroundings’ (quoted in Mellor 1978, 69). The collective effect of the tonal contrasts of black and white, the movement caught in a blur, the reflective skin of the glass, and the uncanny torsos create ontological ‘estrangement’- an image caught mid-transformation that is characteristic of magic realism and Surrealism alike. Roh also includes archive photos of a murdered corpse and the body of a dog contorted with rigour, both discarded amongst the rubble of the city, which recall the Surrealist fascination with the crime scene. The inclusion of meteorological photographs, an electrical storm in particular, corresponds to a photograph of lightning on

the December cover of *La Révolution Surréaliste* also published in the same year. There are obvious parallels between Roh and the Surrealists, not least in their appreciation of Ernst, that are symptomatic of the age. The availability of photographic equipment and the movement within the European avant-garde away from painting prompted a new discourse with many factions. What is important to understand, however, is that Roh's book is no longer about a specific movement, as *Nach-Expressionismus* had been, but about a marvellous commonality in approaches to the object through technology. The overlap between Surrealist photography and magic realism – the ghostly horror of the macabre, the distortion of form, the unexpected juxtapositions, and the self-reflexivity – is born out of the modernist desire to capture 'estrangement'.

Roh's contribution to *Foto-Auge, unter wasser* [Under Water], is a series of nine negative photographs, set in vertical succession – four on the left and five on the right - running parallel to each other, although differing in length due to the uneven number.

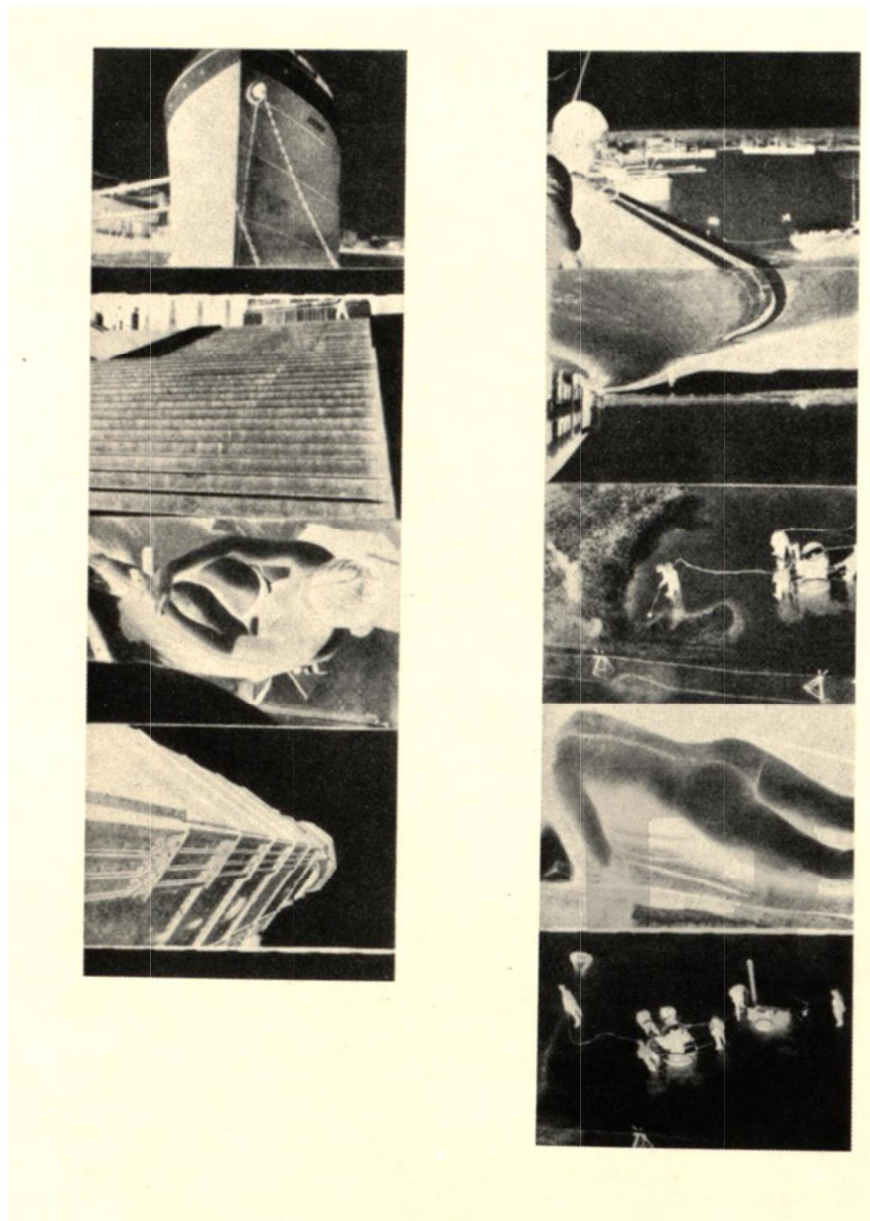


Figure 10: Franz Roh, *unter wasser* [Under water], 1929, photo-negative, silver gelatin print, taken from *Foto-Auge*, 1974

The images are small in comparison to the full-page photographs that comprise the majority of the book. In their vertical arrangement, they resemble film strips, which, in the spirit of cinematic montage urge the viewer to make connections between each image. We know that Roh was enamoured of Hans Richter's *Rollbilder* [scroll pictures], long horizontal paintings on which abstract motifs were painted, repeated and diversified at varying stages of the paper. For Roh these paintings 'possessed a special faculty, allowing the single picture to remain static and the eye to jump forward and backward' (1968, 111). This cinematic inflection, the emulation of the celluloid strip with distinct frames, is evident in Roh's photo series and invites the viewer to become an active spectator.

Light and dark are reversed giving the prints an indeterminate temporality. The light patterns which a viewer may usually associate with daylight or night time hours, or with particular seasonal times of year, have been defamiliarised through the process of negative printing. Roh's manipulated images present landscapes that reverberate with an eerie brightness but also reveal expanses of darkened sea and sky that confound viewer expectation. Brightly lit skies and water reflecting solar rays in their dark incarnations render the buildings, figures and other objects more vivid; they seem to loom out of the darkness. The effect produced in these photonegatives recalls Roh's analysis of Radziwill's nocturnal 'darkling' skies, and the art historian is clearly recreating (copying) Moholy-Nagy's photonegatives, which he extols for their 'magical' qualities (1930, 7).¹⁹ A year earlier, Roh had mused on the principle of inversion in the abstract forms and patterns created by weaving, wicker-work or music, and asked why this same principle should not be applied to the physical world of objects: 'We might perhaps speak of a world in the major and minor key, to indicate at least the completely changed expression of tone values' (1974, 17). This is not simply the exchange of darkness and light attributed to day and night, but the deliberate inversion of the tone attributed to the light or shadow of an object which results in its metamorphosis into something ghostly and unfamiliar.

Examining *unter wasser* the eye reads the images from top to bottom due to a repetitive pattern that seems to descend through them. The column on the left follows the vertical trajectory of composition from the stern of a tall boat, down a set of corrugated steps, stopping at the image of a female body hugging her knees shot from above – her ghostly white head devoid of features – and finally resting on the sideways projection of a tall building against a black background. It is possible that this building is actually a water tower, as it has no windows, fitting the aquatic theme. The right-hand column also flows downward, but with

¹⁹ Three of Moholy-Nagy's works are included in *Foto-Augz*: a photograph of a Paris drain (38), the photomontage entitled *Leda* (55), and a negative image of a boat (69) (of which both the positive and the negative version are displayed in *L. Moholy-Nagy: 60 Fotos*). Each of these, while distinct, can be linked by their distortion of perspective. The first is an extreme close-up of a drain (slightly out-of focus) taken from above, with an overhead light source. The proximity and lighting create an effect of textured abstraction, drawing the eye to the unusual lines of gradation and the shine created by light on rippled water. This recording of a banal and unaesthetic object demonstrates 'how expressive and almost symbolic such fragments of reality can become' (1974, 17). The negative image of the boat also plays with the lines created by light on water viewed from an aerial perspective, and the defamiliarising reversals of black and white.

softer, curved lines. The two initial images depict a coastal scene: the first a snapshot style photograph of a man staring out at the harbour, and the second an upside-down shot of a different stretch of coastline which, when joined to the first image, forms a continuous curve where the beach and the promenade meet. The next three images are not linked in this way, but thematically, as each object appears to 'float' either on the water or in mid-air. The third image is an aerial photograph of a man standing in water with a fire hose. The vehicle itself looks like an apparition, perhaps of a fire engine. The fourth image is a female nude, again photographed from above, suspended in the gauzy whiteness of a floor that has lost its solidity. The final image is unclear until re-inverted positively, whereby the phosphorescent shapes are revealed as men and boats on the water. In presenting this succession of images where the 'palpably plastic may be put next to the optically flowing', (1974, 17) the *negative* reversal of each print renders the objects less distinct and therefore blurs the boundaries between them. Expanses of sea, sand, water, or building follow each other without causing the eye to falter. The spectator may experience the sensation of being underwater or in a dreamlike state, finding themselves in a world reversed into a minor key, rotated and out of context.

Roh's *unter wasser* is a microcosmic representation of the collection as a whole, in which each work is seemingly placed arbitrarily next to the corresponding one on the opposite side of the page and yet on closer inspection begins to unite formally and thematically. In Michael Jennings' discussion of the collection (2000, 23-56), he argues that the photographs are rarely connected through formal similarities. I would disagree: line, perspective, chemical processing, tone, and shape are equal, and not secondary, to thematic concerns. Jennings' analysis of the entire collection of photographs in *Foto Auge* as being based around a contemporary fear of the drowning of Weimar society by technology, of Weimar as the mythical Atlantis, is compelling. However, he fails to recognise that water is often relied upon in its role as a conductor of light, as are glass, smoke, tissue and mirrored surfaces, and is therefore as formally significant in experimental photography as it is thematically. Water's transformative quality is foregrounded in many of these photographs, and in Roh's negative inversions, the brightly shimmering sea becomes unnaturally dark, with ghostly swirls suggestive of

movement. The objects set against the water are rendered indistinct and appear as hallucinatory or dreamlike figures, awash in the darkness. In reflecting and refracting light, water facilitates the metamorphosis that Roh believes to animate the photographs.

Lastly, it should be noted that one of the few artists mentioned by name in Roh's introduction to *Foto-Auge* is 'marvellous' Max Ernst. Roh includes three of his collages: *le massacre des innocents* [*The Massacre of the Innocents*, c.1920], *La Puberté Proche* [*Puberty Approaches*, 1921] and *le chien qui chie* [*Song of the Flesh, The Shitting Dog*, c. 1920], each with painted and photographic elements, and the latter two with textual annotation.



Figure 11: Max Ernst, *La Puberté Proche les pléiades* [Approaching Puberty – The Pleiades], 1921, collage with photographic elements and painting, gouache and oil on paper, mounted on cardboard 24.5 x 16.5 cm., René Rasmussen Collection, Paris

A fundamental difference between the overpainting and the photomontage is that rather than adding elements to a blank canvas the elements are instead subtracted, as Spies notes: 'The realities he adopted lost their definition in the

process. Instead of employing slices of life realistically, he called them into question by dissolving them in his own medium' (1991, 71). In 'Beyond Painting' Ernst asserts that the 'most noble conquest of collage' is the irrational, and the process through which it is achieved an alchemical one ([1947] 2009, 29). The systematic confusion and disorder of the senses of which he speaks is aided by openness to the irrational, to hazard and word play. For example, in both *Le chien qui chie* and *La Puberté Proche* Ernst has scrawled verbal collage (what he calls a 'phallustrade': a compound of the words 'autostrade', 'balustrade' and 'phallus' (2009, 28). In the former the text reads: 'The dog that shits. The dog, well-coiffured in spite of the difficulties of the terrain, caused by an abundant snowfall. The woman with the beautiful throat [...] the song of the flesh'. Like the images - a bestial menagerie mid-leap, juxtaposed with a fan and a spherical object from which protrudes a pointing human art - the words jar rather than flow, creating infinite possibility for interpretation. Ernst's choice of words and images is humorous, yet he argues that this is not true of all his collages. *Le massacre des innocents*, for example, he declares completely devoid of humour. An aerial photograph of a city forms the backdrop for vertical strips of railtrack, the traced outlines of three (massacred) bodies and layered images of a phoenix and a winged insect - Ernst links death to the city. Roh, like Breton, maintained that Ernst painted worlds in which incongruity and imagination created a spark, and that this spark had its roots in real, felt experience. He continually asserts Ernst's realism, which, as far as he is concerned, emphasises the irrationality of modern life.

In *Foto-Auge*, *La Puberté Proche* is positioned opposite an archival photograph of a volcanic crater; the shape of the crater is repeated in the breasts of the faceless woman depicted in Ernst's collage (an image from nineteenth century erotica and dedicated to Gala, the woman Ernst desired). In her description of the picture, Rosalind Krauss recounts the process Ernst undertook: rotating the original photograph by 90 degrees, applying more layers of paint, and describes how 'it [the original photograph] had been made newly pendent, a weightless vertical suspended in the strangely material, velvety ether of the gouache that covers the surface of the photograph like a hardened skin' (1993, 47). The text under the picture reads: 'The gravitation of the undulations does not yet exist'.

The poetry of this phrase, unlike the textual word play of *Le chien qui chie* contributes to a sense of freedom and weightlessness in the painting. The overriding eroticism of the naked body is intensified by Roh's choice to situate it opposite the corporeal geological photograph. This realises Ernst's intention to produce 'an electric or erotic tension by bringing into mutual proximity elements we are accustomed to think of as foreign and unrelated.' (Ernst in a letter to Roh, cited in Spies 1991, 88)

ix. Cold, technical, irrational and marvellous: Roh's contradictory legacy



Figure 12: Franz Roh, ca 1930, silver gelatin print, 90x77 cm, The J. Paul Getty Museum

Roh's theory that 'secret' relationships exist between things reiterates his belief in the hidden or unexpected aspects of the photographed object. But unlike earlier theorists of the metaphysical, such as de Chirico, he insists on photography's availability to all. Where de Chirico writes in *Valori Plastici* in 1919: 'Everything has two appearances: a common appearance, which is the one we almost always see and which people in general see, and the other spectral or metaphysical appearance which can only be seen by exceptional individualist moments of clairvoyance or metaphysical abstraction' (quoted in Paz 1997, 273), Roh never reserves photography's clairvoyance for the few. His view of photography is that it is 'something that everyone can do' (1974, 14); but this in no way diminishes its potential to express a spiritual dimension within the

exterior world. Acknowledging de Chirico's emphasis on the need for clarity in modern painting, Roh argues that 'today everything is brought out clearly' (1974, 17). In the photographic surfaces 'imbued with expression' (15) one can find enigmatic mysteries akin to those emanating from de Chirico's static town squares.

Roh describes the worlds depicted in the *Foto-Auge* pictures as 'exciting' and 'weird', (1974, 16) underlining the tension he senses between the still image and its metamorphic suggestion of the marvellous. He notes in the *schema* for *magischer realismus*, how the miniaturisation and trompe l'oeil backgrounds in several of the paintings create an uncertain impression of distance in which objects are made to seem simultaneously near and far. This disorientation, he argues, can be created to even greater effect in a photograph. In particular it fascinated him that something very ordinary, a small detail or a sight taken for granted could exceed something that was generally considered to be much grander or more beautiful. Musing on a close-up of a puddle, he comments that the image is preferable to an aerial shot of the Atlantic Ocean 'because it shows us optical significance in places that are usually overlooked by conventional people. (The world can become optically significant *everywhere*).' ([1930], Mellor 1978, 41, Roh's emphasis) Ultimately, photography represented for him a 'vast scale of freedom opposite the object' (1930, 7), both the technology and the artist's modern perspective contributing to new ways of seeing reality.

The clearest measure of the influence that photography had on Roh can be seen in his own work. *Unter wasser* (above) is typical of his photographs taken circa 1933, which favour superimposed images, solarisation, negative prints -what he referred to as reversals of 'day and night' – and objects shot from an aerial perspective.



Figure 13: Untitled, ca. 1930; Vintage gelatin silver print; 14x20.6 cm and 20.3x12.4 cm (respectively), Estate of Franz Roh

A retrospective exhibition of eighty five of his photographs and photomontages made during the 1930s was held in New York at the Ubu Gallery in 2006, a collection in which the viewer can clearly recognise the influences of Man Ray, Moholy-Nagy, and in the case of the photomontages, Max Ernst. It also testifies to something that is often overlooked by critics, his Surrealist-inspired photographs of the city in which the chance encounter is comically revealed. See for example the photograph below, in which passers-by are dominated by two incongruously juxtaposed movie posters advertising sexualised murder next to devout faith – a rare glimpse of Roh’s Buñuelian take on reality.



Figure 14: Franz Roh, Untitled, ca. 1930; Vintage gelatin silver print, 14 X 22.2 cm, Estate of Franz Roh

But the Surrealist influence is most strikingly evoked in Roh’s collages, which he made between 1933 and 1938. In his essays on photography - in particular the ideas discussed in ‘mechanism and expression’, he makes clear that his

influences come from Surrealism and Moholy-Nagy's Bauhaus. Although this period of Roh's critical output marks a distinct departure from the German paintings of *Nach-Expressionismus*, we are reminded that Ernst's 'fantastic' collages bridge this gap. Roh was interested in dissolving the distances between ancient schools and modern movements, whether this meant the shift in perception and technique between nineteenth century and modernist photography, or the collation of popular, folkloric, astrological, mythological and technological elements in collage and photomontage. Although he conducted doctoral research on classical seventeenth century Dutch painting under Wölfflin²⁰, Roh was undoubtedly modernist. His championing of Ernst was ahead of his native contemporaries; and his inclusion of unknown artists' photographic work and the insistence on equating so-called high and low art in *Foto-Auge* cements his modernist credentials. However, Roh's critical line of inquiry is not simply a matter of the reproduction of images or a pastiche of earlier styles, which tend to reinforce rather than dissolve boundaries. When Roh adopts his secular vision of spirituality to define the new art, he employs Wölfflin's cyclical history of art movements and philosophies. Roh's vision of artistic evolution layers the past and present mysteriously together: 'It is the phenomenon of rebirths or reinsertions, in other words, of those secret or conscious relationships which are established between two spans of evolution when a new spirituality invoked an older spirituality which corresponds to it' (1997, 273). With regard to photography, it is evident that the layering of images characteristic of avant-garde experimentation – whether the translucent images in the photograms or the juxtaposition of several separate images in photomontage – suggests to Roh a weaving of realities that intersect or converge in a spatial realm manipulated by the artist with the help of light and the apparatus.

Critical evaluations of Roh's *magischer realismus* for contemporary literary studies have not concentrated on his essays on photography, on *Foto-Auge*, or on his photographs and collages. But for any study of cinematic magic realism, I believe this period in Roh's career – with his continued application of the terms magic, fantastic, mysterious and spiritual to evaluate photographic images – to be an

²⁰ Roh's academic thesis already demonstrated a tendency in his work to prioritise the image over text; it contained two hundred photographic illustrations. See Matthew S. Witkovsky, *Foto:Modernity in Central Europe, 1918-1945*, 2007, 17

important historical connection. Not only does it demonstrate a closer relation between his theories and Surrealism (through Ernst, Atget, and Man Ray, for example), but it can offer a framework with which to discuss the aesthetic qualities of later cinematic works in relation to magic realism. Whereas the static, sober and detailed objects ‘glow’ with spirituality in the *magischer realismus* paintings (thanks mostly to the glaze and unnaturally bright light sources) and are strange because of their familiarity, photomontage *deliberately* concocts a space for ordinary reality to be made mysterious. In Roh’s photomontages and collages these magical realms are created by juxtaposing ordinary photographs with detailed linear depiction of tropical beasts and plants, dismembered heads and human musculature. The backgrounds are often plain or of painted landscapes, and do not clearly point to any recognizable locations.



Figure 15: Franz Roh, *Hommage à Max Ernst*, ca. 1935, collage, 21.3x19.7 cm, Estate of Franz Roh

I mentioned above that some art historians were critical of the lack of political charge in Roh’s *magischer realismus*, yet if we consider his photomontages, which borrow heavily from Ernst (as he recognises, see figure 15), a deeply unsettling view of post-war society is revealed. Unlike his photographs which are mostly untitled, the majority of the photomontages bear titles, demonstrating perhaps an increased level of confidence in his work, or, as in the example ‘Bricked Existence’ a more socially critical tone. This work is reminiscent of Dix and Grosz’s paintings depicting the war wounded, and also of Grosz’s earlier *Diabolospieler* in which human form is transformed into automaton. Roh has

chosen to slice the head of the figure in the foreground leaving only his chin. He stands sideways on, cropped at the torso; a muscular shoulder ending in amputation. In addition to his physical wounds, the figure has lost his head, which indicates the possibility of brain damage or trauma. He has turned his back to the row of chimney stacks that symbolise the uniformity and perhaps monotony of modern living and working conditions. The mostly flat, 'stuck on' effect of the figure accentuates the alienation between it and the surrounding architectural order, 'Bricked Existence' seems to suggest that the re-building of towns does not function in the same way as the re-building of men returning from war, struggling to find work and purpose. As Sabine Hake has discussed in relation to German cinema of this period, anti-humanist representations of men correspond to a crisis in the definition of masculinity: the antithesis of an idealised, heroic soldier figure (Hake, 2002). In addition to being fairly derivative of earlier German Dadaists, I find this photomontage to lag behind Roh's writing on photography. In his articles on the liberating technology of camera-based media, he had stressed the importance of innovation and accessibility for all. The subject matter of this particular photomontage would then, in light of his theoretical arguments, seem like an exercise in how to make photomontage based on earlier examples, thus seeming anachronistic within Roh's oeuvre as an artist.



**Figure 16: Franz Roh Vermauerte Existenz [Bricked Existence], ca 1930; Collage;
10.2x12.7 cm, Estate of Franz Roh**

Walter Spies attests that much of the source material for Ernst's collages was not known to the viewer, and the identity of the constituent parts forms a new reality in the context of the work itself (1991, 60). This is also true of Roh's photomontages; however Wendy Grossman offers a compelling reading of Roh's *Masken überleben* [Masks Survive] that points to its historical source material – an indigenous artefact – a prominent feature of modern art seeking to defamiliarise and critique its own culture (see chapter two).



Figure 17: Franz Roh, Masken überleben [Masks Survive], ca. 1938; Collage, 32.1x23.8 cm, Estate of Franz Roh

Grossman argues that the reproduction of the mask in the centre of the collage originates 'from a 1922 publication title *Masken* (Masks), in which 48 objects from indigenous cultures in Africa, the South Seas and the Americas appeared. With its strange amalgamation of human and animal forms, the unusual beaked Luba mask from the Democratic Republic of the Congo would have held particular appeal within a Surrealist framework' (2009, 88). The raffia 'shroud' that Roh uses to mysterious effect, would have adorned the body of the performer, and gives the anthropomorphic figure a trunk-like torso to match the torso of the truncated figure wearing a gas-mask. For Grossman these juxtapositions – the indigenous and the contemporary, the celebratory with the frightening – create a highly political image: 'Created against the backdrop of Nazi rule and the governmental ban of "degenerate art" [...] Roh's phantasmagorical collage signals a world on the edge of destruction' (88).

In summary, Roh's 'heterogeneity' (Paz 1997), his magpie-like eye for new technology and new artistic movements was to prove the undoing of magischer realismus (an undoing that he readily admitted), resulting in a confused, polymorphous and burgeoning definition. Even by the time of *Foto-Auge* coming

to press, Roh had dropped the moniker although he continued to apply the same terminology and similar ideas to his analyses of photographic artworks. The term magic realism was never applied to cinema during the modernist period, and its resurgence as a literary mode in Latin America more than two decades later mostly rejected Roh's manifesto, dismissing it as insubstantial. In a review by Antonio Espina (in *Revista de Occidente* July 1927, No.49, 112-13) we can see some of the reasons why Roh was unpopular in Latin America. Espina writes that the aesthetics described by Roh is 'a halfway aesthetics, resolutely installed between shapeless sensualism and superstructured schematism. It is an idealist realism [...] magical insofar as it creates a new spirit whose form is contained in the supernatural, the super-real' (quoted in Echevarría 1977, 115). Yet in the examples that I have chosen to highlight – Radziwill, Ernst – the 'super-real' elements and the uncanny effects produced in the process of creating the image (the psychological and the material) arguably amount to an aesthetics that is still in circulation today. While Roh's texts may not have sparked a movement, they highlight a preoccupation with the role of the object in a shattered social environment that intersects with the concurrent aesthetic movement of Surrealism. Less radical and more sentimental than Breton's manifestos, mimetic in its scope rather than truly avant-garde, Roh's *Nach-Expressionismus* nevertheless points to a blurring of the boundary between Surrealism and magic realism that I outlined in the introduction as existing for cinema. The following sections consider whether Roh's *magischer realismus* and *demon fantastik* can be said to have purchase as a cinematic mode in the 1920s and 1930s, culminating in an analysis of the heterogeneous filmmaking style of F.W.Murnau (1888-1931).

x. 'Real Dynamism': Film

In the years between *Nach-Expressionismus* (1925) and *Foto-Auge* (1929) European critics struggled to make sense of the implications that the new visual media offered for avant-garde and popular culture alike. The title of Hans Richter's critical text *The Struggle for the Film: Towards a Socially Responsible Cinema*, written in the late 1930s and not published in Germany until 1976, is symptomatic of a wider theoretical 'struggle' in which critics argued between the social 'purpose' and the aesthetics of film. Richter's book undertakes a (Marxist) historical view of the medium, charting social as well as technical history. Photography was a

medium for artistic experiments and domestic pleasure, but it was also a vital component of advertising, entertainment and commercialism on a grand scale, and film played a large role in bridging art and mass culture. German film production of this period was prolific²¹, as was corresponding film criticism – Hans Richter, Walter Benjamin, and Siegfried Kracauer (1889-1966) – and took a largely materialist stance, firmly linking the social and the cultural. In the opening paragraph of *Das Ornament der Masse* [*The Mass Ornament*], Kracauer writes:

The position that an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from an analysis of its inconspicuous surface-level expressions than from that epoch's judgements about itself. [...] The surface level expressions [...] by virtue of their unconscious nature, provide unmediated access to the fundamental substance of the state of things ([1963] 1995, 34).

Both Roh and Kracauer see the value of art for society, but whereas Roh is more concerned with its intellectual role, Kracauer addresses the issue of class through an analysis of cultural production and consumption. He argues that even when commercial art seems empty and lacking in artistry, it is the role of the film critic to 'unveil the social images and ideologies hidden in mainstream films' (Kaes et al. 1994, 635). What is the role of art, of the art object, in mass culture? Is it to 'distract' and entertain, or to educate and socially engage? Christian Rogowski notes that Weimar film faced a 'socio-economic double matrix', caused on the one hand by anti-German sentiment following the war, and on the other hampered by critics sceptical of the new medium and its representation of class and national identity (2010, 8). For Roh, the artist filmmakers Eggeling and Richter are the most 'important innovator[s]' of the era (1968, 112), and he views film in terms of its aesthetic properties as an extension of the photographic 'experiments' he discusses in *Foto-Auge*.

At the heart of discussions on visual culture in the Weimar period, was a debate about high and low art, subjective and social experience. This view of art, as Thomas Elsaesser has pointed out, differs greatly from the aesthetic projects of those such as the Surrealists who 'in their writings on the cinema had tried to

²¹ For an account of production numbers of the 1920s, see Joseph Garncarz, 'Art and Industry: German Cinema of the 1920s' in Grieveson et al. (eds.), *The Silent Cinema Reader*, London and New York: Routledge, 2004, 389,

explore the effects of mechanically produced discontinuity for a poetry of the material imagination' (Elsaesser 1987, 70). In the 1920s and 1930s, magic realist criticism also largely avoids engagement with the socio-historical and economical aspects of producing and consuming art. However, as we shall see, Roh's aesthetic of *magischer realismus* and the 'demon-fantastic' potential of montage can be traced in both avant-garde and commercial films of the period.

Towards the end of 'mechanism and expression' Roh muses on the potential of a 'real dynamic' in the cinema, as opposed to the 'pretend dynamic' of the pictures featured in the collection. He looks to 'the most important utilization of photography, the cinema - a marvel that has become a matter of course and yet remains a lasting marvel' (1929, 18) for new and potentially marvellous art, fascinated by the cinema's potential to animate or freeze any given object. Although he anticipates film in this essay, neither his nor any other criticism of the period links German film directly to the mode of *magischer realismus*. The so-called 'New Photography': Neue Sachlichkeit (in the work of Albert Renger-Patzsch (1897-1966), Moholy-Nagy's Bauhaus, Ernst's magi-Surrealism, Atget's proto-Surrealism, Man Ray's Surrealism, and the various photographic practices developed for documenting microbiological, geological, anthropological and meteorological and criminal events, was diverse. Each of these modes marks a distinct departure from the Expressionist style of German painting that Roh set against Post-Expressionism. However, German film of the 1920s and 1930s evolved differently, and was consumed much more widely. Much commercial cinema continued the literary, theatrical and painterly traditions of Expressionism, with elaborately staged and performed psychological dramas. At one end of the spectrum Gothic monsters and neurotic aristocrats and at the other the worlds of the circus, the fairground and the freak show are presented in abundance, exemplifying the popular forms of fantasy that the post-war generation was afforded in a visit to the cinema.

In 1958 reviewing the initial *schema* for his mode, Roh concedes that the psychological aspects and abstraction of Expressionist painting do not disappear completely from *magischer realismus*. This hybridity is not only remarked by Roh, but by other critics attempting to identify 'genre' in German films of this period. It is from this point that I wish to consider a case for a cinematic magic realism in

Germany in the 1920s and 1930s. Combining Roh's description of the heterogeneity and marvelousness in Ernst's work and the eerie uncanniness of Radziwill's paintings, with the critic's own artistic forays into photography and photomontage, a hybrid aesthetic mode emerges. Although a film such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* has been described as occupying a 'curious stylistic and ideological middle position between expressionism [...] and New Objectivity' (Kaes et al. 1995, 618), the films of Friedrich W. Murnau display a greater heterogeneity and overlapping of styles and ideologies than any others of the period. Although his work is often described as Expressionist, his films resist assimilation into a definitive genre, or even a blend of two. By briefly outlining the major genres of the time, and addressing critical accounts of Murnau's work, this chapter concludes by examining Murnau's 1927 film *Sunrise* through the aesthetic prism of *magischer realismus*.

xi. Neue Sachlichkeit: mainstream versus avant-garde

Although the style of Neue Sachlichkeit can be identified in both mainstream (primarily the 'street' films and melodramatic 'Lulu' films of G.W. Pabst) and avant-garde film, it does not cohere as a cinematic genre. In film criticism it is often synonymous with an objective perspective of street life; a 'fascination with machines and Americanism' (Kaes et al 1995, 618); and in its 'fetishization' of female attire and class wealth, 'an obvious gesture of disavowal of the underlying anxieties about gender and modernity' (McCormick 2001, 77). G.W. Pabst's Neue Sachlichkeit films *Diary of a Lost Girl* (1929) and *Pandora's Box* (1929) contrast the superficiality of melodramatic relationships and consumer goods with the psychological depths foregrounded in the Expressionist film. George Grosz's Neue Sachlichkeit dictum that: 'Man is no longer an individual to be examined in subtle psychological terms, but a collective, almost mechanical concept. Individual destiny no longer matters' ([1921], Harrison and Wood 1992, 273) translated into avant-garde films of the period such as Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* [Berlin Symphony of a Great City, 1927]. The film depicts the urban 'masses' as a nameless and uncountable, and captures them from every angle going about their daily routine. The surge of anonymous human activity is edited into rhythmic montage which underscores the repetition and monotony, with the opening and closing sequence providing a

contrast in the quiet solitude of the abandoned streets. Ruttmann's film represents Berlin objectively, both up close and from a distance. But it was not always recognised for the aesthetic and technical contributions it made to German cinema, receiving criticism for its 'neutral' or 'indifferent' portrayal of the city (Kracauer 2004, 187). However such criticism clearly ignores the technical innovation which made the film a blueprint for Dziga Vertov's (1896-1954) subsequent *The Man with a Movie Camera* (whose photomontage of 3 film stills aptly concludes Roh's *Foto-Auge*)²². Ruttmann's manipulation of the apparatus defied conventional perspective to provide a view from every possible angle, and rendered human, industrial, mechanised and architectural components equal. His film focused on what Ernst Bloch refers to as the 'perpetual becoming' of the modern city (1998, 366): the metamorphic spectacle of the ordinary which Roh in his photobook attributes equally to the meteorological and astronomical factors, as well as to the mundane and criminal.

In 1925 Hans Richter devised a film programme entitled *Der absolute film*, for the *Novembergruppe* (a Berlin-based group of artists who took their name from the Weimar Revolution in 1918, and sought to bring art and the worker more closely together) in conjunction with the documentary department of UFA. Richter's programme brought together 'Entr'acte (René Clair, 1924), *Ballet mécanique* (Fernand Léger 1924), Viking Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale* (1924) and 'abstract films by Ruttmann, Hirschfeld-Mack of the Bauhaus and Richter himself' (Willet 1987, 146). Richter was keen to assert the need for experimental film in a world which increasingly consumed film purely as entertainment, a view he held on to:

The main esthetic [sic] problem in the movies, which were invented for *reproduction* (of movement) is, paradoxically, the overcoming of *reproduction*.

The stronger and more independent the documentary and the experimental film become and the more the general audience has occasion to see them, the more they will adapt themselves to a "screen-style" instead of a theatre-style ([1951] 1986, 157 and 161).

²² It should be noted that Ruttmann's was not the first 'city' film. It was preceded by the French filmmaker René Clair's 17 minute non-narrative film *Entr'acte*, originally designed as an intermission piece for the Ballets Suédois in 1924.

Richter lamented 1920s commercial cinema's abandonment of the 'fantastic' ontology of Georges Méliès for narrative works in which 'inner life' was treated as a 'clinical' phenomenon (1986, 118). He argues that avant-garde film emphasises a rediscovery of techniques from early cinema that is designed to revive the stagnant form of commercial cinema and its psychological plot development. Unlike the continuity editing intrinsic to classical filmmaking, which ensured the viewer's belief in the diegetic scene, German directors such as Ruttmann and Richter strove to reveal the artifice and magic of the technology as art. Their films testify to a technological experimentation of form that is not hidden or masked by illusion or the temporal fluidity of linear narrative. This film programme provided a template which was expanded to include a wider variety of internationally made films and similarly employed for the Stuttgart exhibition four years later, featuring ethnographic documentary, popular releases and 'Avant-garde films in the strict sense of the word' (Kraszna Krauss 1929, 460). The programme director, Gustav Stotz announced:

This exhibition will bring together for the first time work of those people, at home and abroad, who have broken new paths in photography as well as film. Besides the work of the film avant-garde to which belong Eggling [sic], Hans Richter, Léger, Cavalcanti, the Russians and others, there will be work of the pioneers of the field of photography and phototypography, like Man Ray, Paris, Steichen and Sheeler, New York, Lissitzsky, Moscow Piet Zwart, Amsterdam, as well as Moholy-Nagy, Heartfield, Schwitters, Tschichold and others in Germany. In addition are extraordinary productions of anonymous new photographers from all over the world and photographs from various areas of technology and science.²³

Stotz proclaims a new 'optic' that reproduces movement, and has the ability to 'seize time'. As well as training its microscopic lens on the exterior world and unearthing things that usually pass unnoticed, cinema is praised for its ability to see 'beyond the representation of the inanimate, the still life' and 'seize life in action, even violent action' (1977, 78). In his list of films, Stotz emphasises the avant-garde (*L'Etoile de Mer* (Man Ray, 1928) and *Entr'acte* (René Clair, 1924) were also screened), but the programme also included a range of international

²³ Gustav Stotz, 'Werkbund-Ausstellung Film und Foto, Stuttgart 1929,' *Die Form*, IV, Feb 15, 1929, p. 95. Quoted in Beaumont Newhall, 'Photo Eye of the 1920s: The Deutsche Werkbund Exhibition of 1929', published in David Mellor (ed.), *Germany: The New Photography 1927-33*, 1978, 77 - 86

films that had achieved commercial success. Among these as cited by Beaumont Newhall, were *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1919), *Variété* (E.A. Dupont, 1925) *The Last Days of St Petersburg* (Vladimir Pudovkin, 1927) *Ten Days that Shook the World* (Eisenstein, 1927) *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Carl Dreyer, 1928) *The Circus* (Charles Chaplin, 1928) and *Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1928) (Newhall 1978, 85). The Stuttgart film programme reminds us that the exhibition was designed to showcase the breadth of the medium through a range of genres and styles. Thus, despite individual exhibition rooms designed by prominent members of the avant-garde such as John Heartfield and Moholy-Nagy²⁴, and Hans Richter's contributions to the curation of the film programme, the exhibition also recognised the popular and commercial success of film internationally.

In *Foto-Auge* Roh forecasts film as the 'new' medium of the future, and the final image of the collection nods to this prediction. The image is taken from the cinema - a photomontage comprised of three frame enlargements made by Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov (whose work is invoked in the title of Roh and Tschichold's book - 'kino-eye', or cinema eye, symbolising modern vision). Vertov's composition is a visual commentary of the act of seeing, and is designed for the viewer to read from bottom to top. In the bottom image rows of suburban houses situated along a street appear to lean inwards, threatening to topple onto the otherwise ordinary scene in a manner that recalls the architectural distortions of German Expressionist cinema. In the centre image an eye in close-up stares upwards as if at the topmost image in which a woman, her head on a pillow with her face partially covered by a sheet, seems to grimace and cry out. The succession of images follows a vertical²⁵ line created by the street tailing off

²⁴ For details and photographs of the Stuttgart exhibition, see *Film und Foto der zwanziger Jahre*, Hatje Gerd (ed.), Stuttgart Württembergischer Kunstverein, 1979

²⁵ Vertical composition is a prominent aesthetic component of Roh's *unter wasser*, in which the succession of images works against more conventional linear arrangement. In fact verticality and the interruption of linear 'thought' or historical progression was what drew Roh towards the 'new' photography and avant-garde filmmaking, as he attests in 'mechanism and expression': 'new photos show this up and down of appearance. Here the taking of a vertical line (standing house, mast, or the like) obliquely, is stirring. The significance lies in opening astronomic perspectives so to say: vertical in this greater sense really is radial position corresponding to an imaginary centre of the earth' (Roh, *mechanismus und ausdruck: wesen und wert der fotografie [mechanism and expression: the essence and value of photography]* [1929] 1974). The vertical is both 'stirring' and a graphic representation of the extension of the mind towards the imaginary.

into the distance, and then disappearing into the eye, which then looks up at the woman - the most enigmatic image of the three. Vertov emphasises the sense of sight, offering the viewer representations of distorted vision, clear vision, and obscured vision in each of the frames.

Although Roh did not assign 'magic realism' to a cinematic genre, and film criticism of the early twentieth century does not discuss this art historical term in relation to film, as we have seen, there are certainly crossovers into the cinematic medium within Roh's theories on photography. In the German film industry of the 1920s and 1930s we find Expressionism, Neue Sachlichkeit and social realism, the next section explores the possibility of a cinematic magic realism in the work of F.W. Murnau (1888-1931), whose films seem to reproduce ideas in Roh's painterly and photographic theories for the big screen. In terms of genre, his films resist immediate categorisation. A magical real reading of Murnau's films of the Weimar period is necessarily a reading of cinema that looks not only at the culmination of modernist concerns and themes, but is also concerned with the element of blending, or pastiche – if you will- of pre-modern (Gothic, Medieval, folk, Expressionist) and modernist art movements that is particular to magical realist film

xii. Expressionist Film

It has been argued that a considerable number of the films produced in Germany during the 1920s and 1930s testify to a hybrid aesthetic; a visual style that whilst modern and 'new' is connected strongly to aesthetic traces of the past.²⁶ A retrospective analysis (Gunning, Kaes, Elsaesser) of Weimar cinema finds that films made during this period are products of a particular socio-historical moment in time that, as the words of art historians suggest, is extremely difficult to restrict to isolated groups or movements in the arts; and, despite a concern to accurately portray the 'now' of social progress, cannot be limited to a purely linear conception of time. Films of the period have often been bound together under the banner of Expressionism and Lotte Eisner's *The Haunted Screen* [1952] has, to a large extent, been deemed responsible for such early

²⁶ One such example is offered by film critic Tom Gunning, in *The Films of Fritz Lang*, 2000. He reads Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* not as the dramatisation of the struggle between masters and workers (as so many accounts tend to proffer), but as a true conflict between the gothic and the modern.

accounts of these films and their subsequent labelling. Eisner's interpretation of Expressionism asserts that the Expressionist does not see but has 'visions' and is concerned with the 'essence' of the object. This abstraction, which Eisner proceeds to explain as an exchange between interior and exterior worlds differs from magical realism in that the psychological states are made to seem monstrous and unreal. And yet, there are phrases within her descriptions of Weimar films that could be interpreted as being less rigid and exclusively Expressionist than given credit for. She refers to a 'permeable' world where reality is in a constant state of flux, and her assertion that 'Visions nourished by moods of vague and troubled yearning could have found no more apt mode of expression, at once concrete and unreal' (1965, 17). seem, to an extent, accordant with Roh's ideas regarding the object. We must remember that Roh was unable to fully shake off the pre-modern ideas embedded in Expressionist painting. Germanic culture, Eisner continues, is eternally attracted towards 'all that is obscure and undetermined' (1965, 9), and revels in the psychological conundrums that 'visions' rather than sight conjure forth.

In Expressionist cinema, there is a tendency towards the hyperbolic and crude, in which exaggerated symbolism stands for inner states. The heavily stylised aesthetic includes: a combination of gothic costumes, non-naturalistic and theatrical sets, exaggerated acting, excessive use of smoke and steam. Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, (1921) displays the theatrical mise en scene of cinematic Expressionism: the staging of the occult in Caligari's show, heavy paint daubed onto the cardboard set, nocturnal village scenes, velvet curtains and Cesare's curving silhouette: 'artificiality is foregrounded, the distorted quality of the sets makes apparent the internal working of an anguished self, and the Expressionist image is static and artificial' (Dalle Vacche 1996, 167). The streets in which Cesare roams at night seem malevolent, and ordinary objects set within the heavily stylised sets take on uncanny aspects. Eisner insists that this is not merely a matter of style, but something intrinsic to a literary tradition in which objects are defined within the same syntax as one would use for a human being. We have already seen how this operates in Hoffmann's tales, and Expressionist cinema was also indebted to the psychological narratives and uncanny portrayals of Edgar Allen Poe. To define the characteristic heavy shadows and pronounced

light patterns in the films, Eisner replaces the term *chiaroscuro* with *grisaille* and *penumbra*, which refer to shades of grey rather than the oppositional light and dark of the Italian term. *Penumbra* is a partial shadow: the darker outer regions of a sunspot or the greyish half shadow cast by an opaque object obstructing the light source. For the alchemical steams and fogs of doctor's laboratories, and the mystical sense of foreboding she assigns the word *sfumato* to indicate the soft, shadowy relief of objects that seem as delicate and translucent as wisps of vanishing smoke. Added together these elements create a *stimmung*, the visual representation of a mood akin to sorrowful nostalgia, a 'mystical and singular harmony amid the chaos of things' that stirs the imagination (199). The half-shadow, twilight mood of an indeterminate world in which the boundaries between the inanimate and animate, the solid and the vaporous, and the present and the past, are dissolved is an inclination within Expressionism that can also be found in Murnau's films, which address the permeable and undetermined worlds described by Eisner.

xiii. F.W. Murnau's 'Unexpected life'

F.W. Murnau directed 21 feature films between 1919 and 1931, the most well-known being those produced at Berlin's UFA studios with Erich Pommer (*Der Letzte Mann* [The Last Laugh, 1924], *Tartuffe*, 1925, and *Faust*, 1926) and in Hollywood at Fox Studios (*Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans*, 1926) and *Tabu* (1931). Before embarking on a career in film Murnau studied art history under Carl Neumann, a follower of Roh's mentor Heinrich Wölfflin. Angela Dalle Vacche argues that attending university during a period when Wölfflin was chair of history (1901-1912) would necessarily have exposed Murnau to a 'Wölfflinian approach' (1996, 163), and an appreciation for German Romantic painters such as Böcklin, Dürer, and Caspar David Friedrich.

What links Roh and Murnau is their preoccupation with recording the changing nature of reality in the modern world in ways that blur conventional genres and boundaries, straddle painterly and technical modes of expression, and emphasise the theme of metamorphosis. Their work also engages with the relations between conscious and unconscious thought in a more realistic manner than the pure fantastic that Eisner claims for Expressionist cinema. Murnau, like Luis Buñuel, was interested in capturing the antagonism that exists between ideas and

objective reality, and gives an example of how each must communicate the other: 'for example, by wishing to convey the wealth of a certain person as being extreme, I would show alongside of him the reality of things, but not without fantasy, they must dovetail' (Petrie 1985, 72). Despite his deployment of various artistic styles from the past (Romantic, Gothic, myth and folk tales) and the modern (Expressionism, New Objectivity), films such as *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (1922), *Faust* (1926) and *Phantom* (1922) represent reality as a composite of desires, fantasies and the concrete objects of the physical world. In Murnau's films humans are not ontologically favoured above nature or objects: 'but are revealed together'; fantasy and reality cannot be separated when 'the world is already drawn by fantasy' (Cavell 1971, 102).

In a film such as *Nosferatu* (1922) which is most usually associated with horror or Gothic Expressionism, Murnau reveals the real as well as the demonic fantastic. In his commentary on the film, Murnau's friend artist Walter Spies (also friend to Roh and Ernst) notes how the director's attention to technical detail (focal length, telescopic lenses, and stop motion) is harnessed to portray the 'other side' of reality. Anticipating Moholy-Nagy's late 1920s teaching of x-ray photography, microphotography, and astrophotography to students of the Bauhaus, *Nosferatu's* Professor Bulwer studies the habits of carnivorous plants under a microscope.

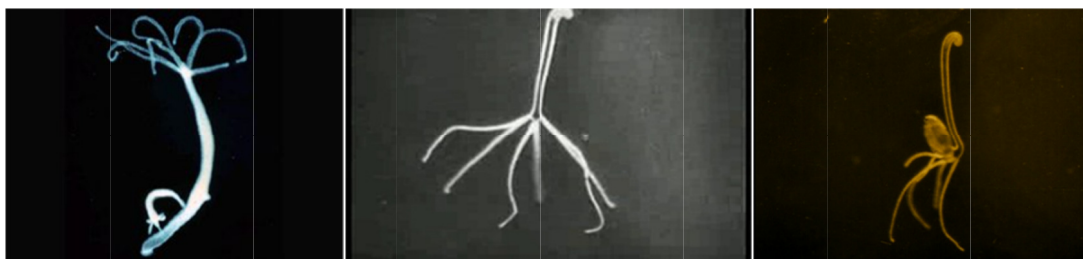


Figure 18: 'Almost incorporeal' Screen shots of Bulmer's microphotography from *Nosferatu*

The resulting tinted microphotographs yield fantastic images of plants and insects ('almost incorporeal', Bulwer comments) which are intercut with shots of the imprisoned 'madman' Knock. This associative montage showcasing of scientific and technological advances adheres to the *Foto-Augē* aesthetic of altered reality, that is nevertheless very much of the real world. In his film *Phantom* (made the same year) Murnau tells the story of man named Lorenz who becomes

obsessed with a woman after her carriage almost runs him over in the street. Following the incident he is plagued with nightmarish visions and besieged by blinding images of the carriage; the repetitive return of his desires surfacing in waking reality.



Figure 19: The phantom carriage, *Phantom*

In this scene both carriage and town have been printed in negative, shadows are strangely luminous, and the carriage becomes a ghostly skeletal image representing Lorenz's unconscious desire. In his original notes for the scene, Murnau wrote detailed instructions regarding the precise degrees of luminosity and darkness that he wanted to create - a *stimmung* 'becoming vague and dark' – illustrating the importance he placed on realising the psychodynamic on screen (Eisner 1964, 47-48).

Dalle Vacche, argues that Murnau brings back ancient mysticism and painterly Romanticism (the rural panorama, horizontal picture plane that contrasts with the verticality of the modern city scenes) in order to represent the cyclical process of history, in which 'the modern returns as the primitive, and the primitive paves the way for tomorrow' (1996, 162-3). Rather than departing from the ordinary until it becomes unrecognisable, or until objective reality 'disappear[s] absolutely' (as Roh describes as having occurred in abstract painting; 1958, 7), Murnau's films often demonstrate a balance between the ordinary and the *extraordinary* that contains the tension and ambiguity of *magischer realismus*. In addition to his composite visual references, his status as both auteur and director of popular cinema underlines 'Film's precarious

position between art and commodity' (Hake 2002, 31). His oeuvre thus fits Roh's vision of the new German art, a combination of past artistic styles, contemporary technical equipment and new perspectives that captures the tension between 'near and far', between deep focus and shallow foregrounded space. Often a character looms out of the darkness, unnaturally large against the toy-like buildings, but the artificiality of the perspective is neutralised by a realistic detail. In *Der Letzte Man* [literally translated as The Last Man, but altered to the punning title The Last Laugh] or *Sunrise*, the modern city is displayed with particular emphasis on light and geometry. The glass skin of the department store in *Der Letzte Man* glitters with wealth in a city where families struggle to feed their children, and the building forms a barrier between them, yet ultimately this barrier is proved permeable. Of all Murnau's films, *Sunrise* is the closest to what we could call a cinematic magic realism for a number of reasons that I shall discuss below.

Sunrise was Murnau's first Hollywood film, and won an Academy Award for Charles Rosher and Karl Struss' cinematography. The film was scripted by Carl Mayer from one of German novelist Hermann Sudermann's (1857-1928) Lithuanian Stories, 'The Journey to Tilsit', in which a young peasant is bewitched by a sexually appealing servant. In Murnau's version (Eisner asserts that he 'emancipated himself' from Mayer's more 'sober and prosaic' script, 1964, 175) this becomes a couple: 'The Man' and 'The Woman', whose lives are disrupted by the intrusion of The City Woman into their pastoral tranquillity. As both the title of the film and the initial inter-title emphasise, this is the story of an unnamed couple, who are 'of no place and everyplace'; Murnau deliberately removed the specific names and locations that had existed in the original novel. The story is driven by the characters' attempts to recognise, indulge, resist and resolve their desires against the drama of a planned and failed murder. The narrative proceeds through a series of flashbacks which make manifest the innermost thoughts of the protagonists, and the spectator is drawn to reflect upon the gaps between that which is known and unknown.

Made in Hollywood, *Sunrise* is visually rooted within Weimar Germany, and yet it resists the boundaries of place and time by literally flying between the two. Echoing Eisner's description of Murnau's work, Lucy Fischer argues that *Sunrise*

is representative of the contradictions within modernity itself: 'a text marked by fluid boundaries, junctions that trace the subtle connection between entities rather than their clear demarcation' (1998, 8). The intertitles tell the spectator that life is much the same for everyone, 'in the city's turmoil' or 'under the open sky on the Farm' (the definite article here deliberately stressing the one farm for all), and wherever the cyclical pattern of the sunrise and sunset occurs, the outcome may be bitter or sweet. From this, we may ascertain that *Sunrise* is concerned with a universalist definition of humanity, where shared circumstances and archetypes are employed to represent a 'mass' audience or a mainstream notion of 'the people'. However, although Murnau does use these to suggest common threads and to identify particular class or gender roles within the texture of modern existence, they are secondary to the subjective states that are evoked, in particular the scenes which visualise a character's inner turmoil.

The film opens with a rapid and ingenious montage sequence entitled 'Summer Time'. Made three years prior to Dziga Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929), it makes use of similar techniques, juxtaposing animated films, splitting screens to cram more images into the frame, and presents the ideological theme of leisure and mass entertainment, a theme which later captured Vertov's imagination.



Figure 20: Spectacular Train 'Crash', Sunrise

It acknowledges a modernist ‘reproduction’ of temporality that is often seen in avant-garde films through rapid Eisensteinian-style montage with no importance placed on the linear progression of narrative. The sequence divides urban space into its technological and leisure pursuits, unleashing images of ocean liners, trains, glistening glass surfaces and girls in bathing suits. Figure 21 illustrates how montage can be fantastic, as Roh saw it: the girl in the foreground gazes out to sea whilst an ocean liner moves towards her; the geometric design of the building in the top left creating yet another planar dimension and a combination of both static and moving images. The spectator is bombarded with images of a life that can be expressed in Tom Gunning’s phrase ‘pure instance’ (2004, 49) which here combines the gesture of display in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century cinema of attractions with the artistic use of montage to produce an ‘alternative temporality’ (49).



Figure 21: Leisure and technology, *Sunrise*

In an interview with Mathew Josephson, on his way to Coney Island Murnau expresses his openness to the frenzied collage of modern life: ‘There are wonderful types here, wonderful faces. Tremendous energy. The whole tradition here suggests speed, lightness, wild rhythms. Everything is novel. Sensational’ (Petrie 1985, 42).

Murnau transports the spectator through time by way of gradual dissolves, rear-view projection, long takes, and a slow-paced associative montage that, unlike Eisenstein’s rapid cutting between frames, seems to drift like fog from frame to

frame. An exception to this is during the storm when the action is divided between the city fair and the couple on the lake. Here the urgency of the situation and the magnitude of the storm are underscored in the marked cuts between frames. He also employs eye-line matches to emphasise and repeat central emotional motifs, and layers superimposed images against dark skies to indicate an interior state of mind which gives the impression of linking unconscious and conscious time. The spiritual is revealed within the landscapes, but is closely linked to the characters' states of mind: dark, heavy fog for The Man, sweet, sunny pastorals for The Wife, and animated dancing for The City Woman, rendered demonic and witchlike in the moonlight. The spectator's eye is persuaded to make connections between shots which are cut to implicate and suggest. In addition Murnau appropriates the modernist symbols of the train and the street car to illustrate the speed at which the distance between the city and its periphery can be traversed. The city is the home of the 'new woman', of jazz, lunar parks, and modern photographic studios, and yet the access to modern transportation means that city life can be felt even from miles away in the country. Murnau's film does not fetishise the city in the manner Pabst does in his chic depictions of Lulu's deluxe Berlin apartment (paid for by her rich suitor) in *Pandora's Box*. The city instead becomes part of the same conscious space as the country, and 'modern' or 'traditional' states of mind are tied to and exemplified in the three main characters as they move freely between the two spaces. Modern concerns do not lie in a particular place, but are set in motion by people and by people's relations to a shifting objective reality. The disparity between wealth and poverty and between the city and the country are not treated as polar opposites, but as co-existing parts of the same reality. In an early scene The Husband meets the City Woman at night in the marshes, and as she talks to him of life back in the city, jazz trumpeters and lights are superimposed onto the dark sky, and the two characters look up, as if to a large cinema screen.



Figure 22: The City Woman and The Husband, Sunrise, 1926

This juxtaposition has the effect of reducing distance between the two locations. In a later scene, The Husband and the Wife are caught in a violent storm while sailing home. As they kiss, Murnau cuts back to the city where the crowds are returning home at the end of the day in clouds of dust.



Figure 23: The storm's 'magical' transformative powers, Sunrise

This cutting back and forth continues throughout the sequence of shots that follows, the clouds of dust, sheets of rain and electrical flashes of lighting uniting city and country in one ominous event caused by nature's mysterious force. The agonisingly long search for the body of The Wife thrown out of the boat in the storm, reaches to the far corners of the landscape, lit by the diegetically 'naturalised' but artificial moonlight and spotlighting attributed to the lightning.

Roh asserted that the revelation of the mysterious and marvellous always disrupts the tranquillity of the paintings; Murnau achieves this sense of disequilibrium in various ways. The flashes of lightning seem overly theatrical and fantastic, as do the dust 'storms', yet they are a very natural occurrence. In Roh's *Foto-Auge* a meteorological photograph captures the dramatic, supernatural aspects of the material world at a point of transformation that is repeated here in *Sunrise*.



Figure 24: Th. Mettler, "Kugelblitz" (Lightning), Date unknown, published in Roh's *Foto-Auge* catalogue, 1929



Figure 25: The Lighting Storm, *Sunrise*

Lotte Eisner suggests that in *Sunrise*, Murnau's intersection of location shooting with a constructed set, also had an impact on this rupture in the 'real'.

Studio and nature complemented and harmonized with each other. Mists wreathed a landscape which had been built on the set.

An artificial moon rose over the real marshes; the camera, expressively mobile, revealed pools of water, and squelchy soil with deep footmarks and thick clumps of rushes growing out of it at the bottom of the picture. After the wreck of the boat, filmed on a reservoir on the lot, the fog rose over the real lake, and the light of the moon looked as if it had been superimposed. Where does reality begin? (1964, 179)

The real and unreal – natural and artificial – are grafted together in order to achieve the atmosphere Murnau desires. Often he uses real castles, houses, villages, fairgrounds and props which he makes weird. Steam, soot, negative images, superimposition, dissolves, a variety of natural and artificial sources complicate the visual field. He shoots from alienating aerial perspectives, often tilting the camera for subjective point-of-view sequences, and oscillating between clear close-ups and long soft-focus shots. The sky or the sea is a blank canvas against which to project the many forms of light: city lamps, stars, lighting, and Faust's alchemical explosions. As Roh suggests, background can be symbolic of an absolute nothingness, or a death from which something emerges and vibrates with energetic intensity. In her work on Murnau's *Nosferatu* and the use of art in film, Dalle Vacche explains that a phenomenon occurs in 'fantastic' art when artists desire to blur the limit between the supernatural and the natural. She argues that, conversely, Murnau strives to accentuate this meeting of antithetical states, such as highlighting 'the entrance into a forest, or the meeting of land and water at the shoreline, precisely because his fantastic tale is about the unstable boundaries between what is real and what is imaginary, what is normal and what is monstrous' (1996, 178).

For Roh, as for Murnau, such expanses create a space for contemplation, filled with the potential for sensory effects, particularly in Murnau's films when the panoramas are intercut with images that signal psychodynamic transformation (a jealous wife in *Sunrise*, a saddened monster in *Nosferatu*, a neurotic city clerk in *Phantom* (1922), or a worker on the edge of nervous breakdown in *Der Letzte Man*). His foggy, luminous vistas provide the dramatic settings for the unfolding of psychodynamic events or a metamorphosis between animate and inanimate. The spectator cannot say whether it is the influence of a 'city' state of mind that has 'corrupted' The Husband, or whether his dark and brooding form was already affected by something deep within the countryside that he inhabits. Lotte

Eisner suggests that the intersection of location shooting with a constructed set, also had an impact on this rupture in the 'real'.

Brian Henderson argues that Murnau's editing is 'spiritual' and unlike montage, which serves to present a series of shots as an arranged 'piece', uses editing 'solely to express mystical or non-spatial relations; that is, to treat widely-spread subjects as though they were in the same frame' (1992, 317). The editing in the scene below, of the couple kissing in front of two rear projectors, transforms almost magically from an 'imagined' pastoral space to the reality – where the couple are standing in the middle of a busy city road – blending the sites of country and city into each other psychologically and visually once again.



Figure 26: 'Spiritual editing'? *Sunrise*

Henderson names this style of editing, of cutting between long takes the 'intra-sequence cut' or 'mise-en-scene' cutting (318); and gives as an example the scene in *Nosferatu*, where two events – Nina sitting at home and Jonathan miles away in the castle – are linked spiritually through space and time, echoing, or referencing, each other. This magical 'reaction' between disparate concepts posited within the same diegetic frame is also put to full effect in *Sunrise* when The Man and The City Woman sit looking up at the sky from their rural love nest in the marshes. The image of the city symbolically gestures in two directions: towards The City Woman's place of origin – the site of modernity where she has learned how to dress and assert her independence – and towards the future, where The Man will address his own desires and resolve the problems in his marriage in a fleeting visit to the fair.



Figure 27: Guilt and fantasy, emotional layering

In *Sunrise*, the repressed returns in the form of guilt for The Husband, and what becomes magical about its representation is that Murnau always links state of mind to landscape through ominous superimpositions. Moreover, human traces are left imprinted upon the landscape in the form of stirred water, footprints, or the sodden bundle of bulrushes floating on the lake with which The Husband planned to escape after drowning his wife. The Gothic portrayal of the grip of fear and guilt becomes magically real when the waters seem to take on a life of their own. This also works inversely, with the surfaces of the liminal *umwelt* (Eisner) of the films, being penetrated by contemporary references to the real. For example, the ‘metacinematic’ (Guerin 2005, 136) film within a film sequence in Paul Wegener’s *Der Golem* (1920) projects scenes of ‘wandering Jews’ onto a screen of curtains; the film is watched by the Emperor and his men, provoking much laughter at the ‘outsider’ community. This cinematic interjection into an otherwise anti-modern setting renders the plight of the Jewish community more ‘real’ and urgent because of its mediation as a film – a document of the modern age thrust into the legend. It is a magical interlude that distracts the spectator from the plot, and persuades them to think about a political and modern concern for Germany. Likewise in Murnau’s *Faust*, the plight of the homeless, ostracised Gretchen and her illegitimate child, a common stereotype of post-war Berlin, the real permeates the Gothic sets, black magic and sorcery.

Murnau’s depiction of city life in *Sunrise* and the tension he sets up between the modern city scenes and the Gothic plot of desire and immorality openly display the stylistic and thematic contradictions. What can be described as magically real about such disclosure through phantom images and multiple layered dissolves is that Murnau does not reset the boundaries or erect any new limitations with which to contain or alter them in the future. His films, whether leaning towards

the Gothic (*Nosferatu*, *Phantom*), the melodramatic (*City Girl*), the mythological (*Faust*), all, albeit to a lesser degree than in *Sunrise*, testify to Murnau's modernist magic. For Thomas Elsaesser, Murnau's art succeeds in the tension that he creates between the real and the unreal which makes them indistinguishable: 'an ability to naturalize artifice, and to heighten reality to the point where the action is suffused with an atmosphere at once lyrical and uncanny, ethereal and mysterious' (1987, 3). Murnau conveys the ordinary yet fantastically structured patterns of emotion and imagination while engaging with the viewer's experience of contemporary life. He hoped to capture everything modern life and its phantom past had to offer, and his films present the mysteries of the cosmos from the clues left by its objects. Murnau more than any other filmmaker working as Roh's contemporary seems to employ an artistic framework that includes many of the art historian's *schema* for *magischer realismus* and his intention to 'photograph thought' corresponds with Roh's dictum that 'new art' should convey and invoke a perceptory shift.

This chapter has outlined and highlighted the significance of Roh's *magischer realismus* for a wider consideration of the mode which moves from painting to film. As we have seen, his ideas, like the photograms presented in *Foto-Auge*, privilege the overlapping, the ephemeral and the insubstantial in order to grasp at the dynamism of life and the spontaneous and often non-logical, or non-rational, movement of human thought. Chapter two investigates the dawn of a new magic realism in the late 1920s, which, via French Surrealism and the *merveilleux* in Paris, was to come to fruition as a Cuban literary mode in the late 1940s. The migration of Roh's term via the Surrealist marvellous was made possible by Cuban writer, journalist and musician Alejo Carpentier, who lived in Paris between 1928 and 1939 working with such proponents of the *merveilleux* as Desnos, Aragon, Breton, and Bataille. Carpentier, in a similar vein to Espinosa (above), was fairly dismissive of Roh's book on magical realism, but Roh's moniker nevertheless stuck in his mind when he came to name a new mode of Latin American writing. Carpentier, to a much greater extent than Roh (given his close relationships with prominent Surrealists), delimited his mode by measuring it against Surrealism, and subsequently attempted to draw a line under his eleven years in Paris. His flawed claim that Surrealism is manufactured

and therefore inauthentic when compared to the marvels of the ‘new world’, rests somewhat problematically unchallenged in Jameson’s much later reading of cinematic magic realism, and will be discussed in depth below. I find that this delimitation has hindered rather than helped to define either magic realism or cinematic magic realism. Critics who accept the influence of European Surrealism on the Latin American literary variant embrace a wider cultural hybridity of form and content that helps us to understand the complex evolution of magic realism. Jean-Pierre Durix, for example, argues that ‘magic realists [he cites Rushdie and Márquez] as we have defined them owe as much - and possibly more - to European cultures as to the ‘primitive’ traditions of their native countries. Their allegiance is to Rabelais, post-modernism and surrealism as much as it is to orature’ (Durix 1998, 131). Juan Carlos Ubilluz insists that Carpentier’s interest in the indigenous and slave cultures of Cuba and Haiti is actually rooted in the Parisian avant-garde citing ‘Carpentier’s Batailleian ethnographic gaze in *El reino de este mundo*’ (Ubilluz 2006, 20).

In addition, although Carpentier is primarily remembered for his novels and his monograph on Cuban music, his articles often discuss the social role of the cinema and film aesthetics, and are particularly concerned with avant-garde film artists and filmmakers. In fact, Carpentier’s first mention of the marvellous real is not, as almost every account of his work has proffered, in the prologue to his novel *El reino de este mundo*, but in an article on Jean Cocteau and avant-garde cinema. In a series of journal and magazine articles discussing European avant-garde cinema, German Expressionism and *Neue Sachlichkeit*, Soviet cinema, Charles Chaplin and Walt Disney, Carpentier connects the medium of film to an incipient definition of *lo real maravilloso*. His modernist-informed sensibility combined with a socio-historical approach; support for Cuban independence (he corresponded with Fidel Castro up until his death in 1980), minority groups and folkloric culture, culminate in a hybrid style and syncretism that has been adapted by many subsequent artists throughout Latin America. Clearly his writing also contributed to an awareness of Surrealism in Cuba that was also furthered by the paintings of Wifredo Lam (1902-1982)²⁷, but what of cinema?

²⁷ Cuban artist Wifredo Lam spent most of his life in his native Cuba, but also studied in Paris and collaborated with André Breton, illustrating his poem ‘Fata Morgana’. He was ‘conversant with both the concerns of the European avant-garde and the mythical mysteries of the ‘creolized’

Michael Chanan, one of the leading scholars of Cuban cinema, argues that European avant-gardism contributed to the aesthetic of Cuban film: ‘Cuban artists and intellectuals were schooled in a highly syncretistic culture that celebrated rumba and surrealism, Yoruba gods and Catholic transcendentalism, in equal measure’ (Chanan 2004, 5).

Beginning with the Bretonian definition of chance, the next chapter will introduce the Surrealist *merveilleux* in order to better understand the relation of magic realism to Surrealism, and also the significance of non-rational thought and unexpected juxtapositions in Surrealist film to a cinematic magic realism. In line with Peter Bürger’s definition of Surrealist chance as an ideological construct, it examines the Surrealist aim to enrich the life of urban man [sic] by focusing on ‘those phenomena that have no place in a society that is organized according to the principle of means-end rationality’ (Bürger 2009, 65). It will chart Carpentier’s experience of the European avant-garde chronologically, drawing parallels between his thoughts on cinema and Roh’s on photomontage. It will discuss how Carpentier’s literary practice is indebted to an art historical legacy that, in contrast to *magischer realismus*, politicises *lo real maravilloso* and opens the mode up to postcolonial and multi-perspectival readings.

cultures of [his] homeland’, and known for his Cubist style ‘with its fracturing of the empirical world into several simultaneous modes of existence’, presenting ‘the same multiplicities of reality that combine the empirical and surreal worlds in an African cosmological system.’ For a discussion of Lam’s painting see Lowery Stoke Sims 1985, 91

Chapter 2 – Magic or Marvellous: Alejo Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso* and the Surrealist *merveilleux*

i. Surrealising the marvellous: Breton's definition and its application

Franz Roh in 1925 argued that magic does not descend to the represented world, but 'palpitates' behind it waiting to be revealed (1995, 16). The magical element in Post-Expressionist art is not linked to sorcery, superstition, or divinity; instead it derives from an unmasking of material reality through contemplative awareness. The clear depiction of an object rather than its expressive, abstracted version, says Roh, has the effect of creating a 'miracle', a 'marvel'. Against the chaos and individualism that he associates with the Expressionist movement, this new painting presents calm spaces in which 'a variable commotion crystallizes into a clear set of constants'. The vivid representation of a plate of glass or an ordinary brick wall draws attention to the enigmas of existence, of 'an apparent persistence and duration in the midst of a demoniacal flux' (1995, 22).

In contrast to the speed and 'vital impetus'¹ which sees realism appear briefly amidst abstraction in Expressionist painting, Roh believes the new realism to offer a new relationship with reality: the object magically metamorphoses in a moment of contemplative quietude in which 'the forms of the spirit' (human thought) interact with the solidity of physical objects for 'a brief stay in eternity' (1995, 22). The contradiction, or tension, inherent in *magischer realismus* painting results from juxtaposition within the object itself, the object that exists both outside and inside the individual. But, as we have seen, Roh later attributes this effect to juxtaposition *between objects*, as in the case of Ernst's collages and photomontages, or the manipulation of objects through technical photographic means. Despite his delimitation of magic realism through Surrealism (which, given his analysis of Ernst has already been proved problematic), Roh's rhetoric

¹ Roh refers to Henri Bergson's *élan vital*, (a term applied to French pre-War patriotic spirit), which he uses to characterise the romantic spirit and explosive passion of the previous generation (in Germany) Although Bergson's concept – the evolutionary process of 'becoming' of matter and spirit driven by a vital energy that reproduces in a constant flux – could be applied to an analysis of the indeterminate state of tension between the subject and object (a bridge between the spiritual and physical matter), for Roh it is a turn of phrase that he associates with Expressionist passion and not the contemplativeness of the new realism. See Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, [1911], 1983

at this point in his career bears some similarity to Breton's 'Manifesto of Surrealism' published a year earlier in 1924.

As already discussed in Chapter One, *magischer realismus*' subjective realism failed to galvanise artists or art critics due to Roh's ambivalent and overly effusive descriptives, positing the mode somewhere between 'vague sensuality and highly structured schematics' (Roh 1995, 23). Carpentier, a highly political figure in Cuba, found Roh's description of the mode to lack substance and political acumen: 'Franz Roth [sic], no, what he called magic realism was simply painting which combines real forms in a manner that doesn't conform to everyday reality'² (1998, 197). However, Carpentier, reading a translation of *Nach-Expressionismus* in *Revista de Occidente* in 1925³ quotes Roh as having cited Chagall's painting as begin exemplary of magic realism, when we know the opposite (he labelled Chagall Expressionist) to have been the case (Roh 1998, 179-180). It is quite possible that something was lost in translation, not only in the words of Roh's text itself, but in Carpentier's reading of a treatise on painting from his literary and political perspective. Similarly Carpentier, as Roh had done before him, was to distance himself from the Surrealist marvellous based primarily on Breton's guidelines for Surrealism in the *First Manifesto*. Where Roh had defined the overriding importance of dreams, Carpentier's criticism was aimed at the Surrealist practice of automatic writing and collage (which Roh found marvellous in Ernst's and Man Ray's work).

Carpentier has recounted many times how Surrealism helped him to see the world with an increased clarity and freedom, and yet he remains sceptical of its methods, likening them to a 'burocracia de lo insolito' or bureaucratic marvellous (1985, 131). This criticism is often cited as the reason for his decision to withdraw from the movement (which will be discussed below) but here it is necessary to avoid generalisation. Not all Surrealist works are manufactured or

² 'Franz Roth, no, lo que él llamaba realismo mágico era sencillamente una pintura donde se combinan formas reales de una manera no conforme a la realidad cotidiana', 1998, 197, my translation.

³ Carpentier recalls reading Roh's *Nachexpressionismus* in *Revista de Occidente* in 1925, with the same frontispiece as the original German edition: 'The Sleeping Gypsy' by Rousseau. However, Luis Leal asserts that it was first translated by Fernando Vela into Spanish and published in *Revista de Occidente* in 1927 (Leal, 2007, 62).

willed into being; many evolve through chance and can be found in unexpected realities. Also, contrary to instances often cited, (Richardson, 1996) Carpentier made many glowing references to Surrealist practice throughout his career. Moreover, his writing bears many marks of European culture, from art historical, musical and literary references to his 'outsider' point of view, an inevitable result of his lengthy absence from the Caribbean, ultimately providing him with the impetus to pen his own Latin American 'manifesto'. In order to address Carpentier's criticism of Surrealism and his subsequent claim for a new Latin American mode, in which the marvellous was culturally and ethnically inscribed as opposed to 'manufactured' by artists, it is first necessary to take a closer look at Surrealism during the 1920s and 1930s.

Breton begins his manifesto with a criticism of cultural realism, of a post-Enlightenment culture 'reigned' over by logic and 'absolute rationalism' in which superstition has been repressed. He argues that it has become increasingly difficult to relate to the exterior world, as it has been reduced to the superficial and factual. Realism, he says, citing Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* as an example, is vacuous, repetitive and mediocre: 'our brains are dulled by the incurable mania of wanting to make the unknown known, classifiable' ([1924] 2010, 9). To counter this one must navigate reality through the imagination and re-engage with myths and contingencies. By the early 1920s several of Freud's papers on dream analysis had been published in French and this psychoanalytic methodology inspired Breton greatly. He refers to the process of psychoanalysis and the relations between unconscious and conscious realities as 'strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface' (2010, 10). In particular, Freud's interpretation of dreams assisted Breton in his desire to sink 'below the surface': 'in "reality" [...] I prefer to fall' (2010, 11). It is not the analytical outcome of Freud's theories that provides Breton with an approach to apprehending reality, but the process. By linking the states of dream and reality, Breton embarks upon a quest for 'absolute reality, a *surreality*' (2010, 14), a processing of the world through the mind's acceptance and rejection of social life. Breton's emphasis on oneiric reality is absent from the theory of *magischer realismus*, (save, perhaps, in regard to Rousseau's *The Sleeping Gypsy*); for Roh, subjective thought (conscious or unconscious) is inherently part of the exterior world.

Breton privileges thought above all, which is why from the outset Surrealism was not primarily intended to be an aesthetic movement, but ‘a cry of the mind turning back on itself [...] determined to break apart its fetters, even if it must be by material hammers!’⁴; intention and process come first, with the production of art objects and literary works second. A few years before this first manifesto, Breton, along with Philippe Soupault, Louis Aragon and Robert Desnos, had been engaging in what became known as ‘psychic automatism’, the expression of ‘the actual functioning of thought’ through verbal and written means in the absence of any the conventional constraints of punctuation, logic, cohesion or moral concern. (2010, 26) The idea, Breton explains, emerged in 1919 when, upon the verge of falling asleep, a strange phrase ‘There is a man cut in two by the window’ suddenly came to him, seemingly without any relationship to anything he had experienced consciously that day. The words felt as real as to be actually ‘*knocking at the window*’ (2010, 21, original emphasis), and he was seized with the compulsion to incorporate the phrase into a poetic composition. Breton then attempted to replicate this unfettered psychic process by engaging in various games such as speaking aloud or writing at speed without any pause or intervention, later progressing to include experimental word and drawing games - *cadavres exquis*⁵ [exquisite corpse] - and trances and séances, the occultism of the funfair.

These early endeavours (published in Breton and Soupault’s 1921 *Champs magnétiques* [Magnetic Fields] and later in the journal *La révolution surréaliste* (9-10, 1927), explored various methods for dissolving the artificial constructions and conceptual oppositions generated in modern societies. Reason and irrationality, perception and representation, freedom and determinism can be examined and displaced or fragmented through such techniques. For Salvador Dalí, reflecting on the extraordinary drawings produced in the games of *cadavres exquis*, the anthropomorphic figures confirmed ‘the haunting notion of the

⁴ This is part of the 1925 ‘Declaration’ co-signed by 26 members of Breton’s Surrealist group including Aragon, Breton, Artaud, Desnos, Éluard, Ernst, Soupault, under the address *Bureau de Recherches, Surréalistes*, 15 rue de Grenelle, in Nadeau, 1968, 308

⁵ Based on an old parlour game in which several players write a word or phrase on a piece of paper, fold it over and pass it on to the next person to add to, exquisite corpse translates Lautréamont’s dictum that ‘poetry must be made by all and not by one’ into practice. Producing a sentence, a poem or an anthropomorphic form (some games were based on each player drawing a body part) the exquisite corpse, was a game of analogy used to create links between words and images that initially seem to have no logical connection or causality.

metamorphoses' (Dalí [1931] 1968, 418). But despite Breton's claim for a mode of artistic expression freed from the constraints of rules or conventions, each of these activities actually relies on a system, albeit one of 'nonconformism' (2010, 47). What is perhaps more unconventional is the lack of concern regarding an end result or a theoretical conclusion. A 'poem' cut from the scraps of newspaper headlines ('a pair of silk stockings is not A leap into space A stag') offers endless possibility for interpretation. (2010, 42) What is created by these chance connections or retrieved from experiments in 'uncensored' automatism requires time for contemplation.

Automatism was a formative procedure of Surrealism, but in time its members tired of its 'dreary idiocies' (Aragon quoted in Taylor 'Introduction', 1994, x) and looked to the changing face of the city for inspiration. Although Breton had been obsessed with exteriorising his imaginative leaps of 'fancy' through automatic writing, his writing increasingly focused on Paris and the characters and events that imposed themselves on his daily routine. As Walter Benjamin notes, at the centre of the Surrealist imagination and the world of things, 'stands the most dreamed-of of their objects, the city of Paris itself.' (Benjamin 2009, 149) Louis Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* [Paris Peasant, 1926], Breton's *Nadja* (1928) and Robert Desnos' poem 'La grande complainte de Fantômas' (1933)⁶, are prominent examples of this tendency to transcribe the city surrealistically. Each foregrounds the strange, almost unbelievable, life of the city as reflected in the minds of the people who pass through it, and in the objects that remain. The Surrealist axiom which attributes equality to imaginative and concrete reality is developed through the writers' experiences of Paris's cafés, theatres, boulevards and facades. By mining the unconscious of the city these men found out more about themselves. The following section will focus on two aspects of Surrealist writing on the city that clearly bring the question of the marvellous to bear on the mode of magic realism: first, the objects themselves – the buildings, signboards, and ephemera of the city – and second, the excavation of history (individual and social) using objects or events as clues.

⁶ Based on the popular crime novel series Fantômas written by Marcel Allain Marcel (1885–1969) and Pierre Souvestre (1874–1914) and published between 1911 and 1913, and Louis Feuillade's interpretation of the novels for his silent film series (1913–1914), Desnos' poem emphasises the spectral and the gory aspects of the criminal's vivid exploits while Paris sleeps.

ii. The affect of the marvellous

The Surrealist *merveilleux* 'is the eruption of contradiction within the real' (Aragon 1994, 204); the 'spark' that comes to the artist 'spontaneously, despotically'; and the 'luminous phenomenon' that results from the juxtaposition of two disparate realities, (Breton 2010, 36-37). In an oft-cited declaration from the first manifesto Breton famously states that 'the marvelous is always beautiful, anything marvelous is beautiful, in fact only the marvelous is beautiful' (2010, 14). This is no conventional beauty, rather a beauty that is fecund, irrational and improbable. Breton describes, for example, the contradictory pleasure of the *merveilleux* at work in gothic fiction (such as Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*), in which the storytelling is rescued (Breton does not, in general, enjoy novels) by an infusion of weird and sometimes frightening occurrences. Similarly, in regard to certain poems, the 'magic effect' of the *merveilleux* does not diminish with time but 'returns' ([1937], 1988, 9); the initial shiver or emotional response persists. This fertile state of excitement, he muses, is akin to the uninhibited sense of self in childhood: 'It is perhaps childhood that comes closest to one's "real life"' (2010, 41). Continuing to appropriate psychoanalysis Breton explains how the *merveilleux* appears in object form as a series of 'romantic ruins' - a symbol, a memory, a fragment - of a more 'general revelation' that surfaces at an unpredictable moment (2010, 16, original emphasis). These 'romantic ruins' as Hal Foster notes, are akin to the repressed desires and neuroses discussed in Freud's essay on the uncanny (1993, 21), but they also represent a society's thwarted attempt to realise certain ideological aims within the dominant superstructure⁷. The displaced object signifies the return of a historically repressed moment, 'a connection between psychic and historical dimensions' (161). For Louis Aragon, 'Future mysteries will arise from the ruins of today's' ([1926] 1994, 15).

Foster argues that the Bretonian *merveilleux* is significantly shaped by ideas of the uncanny (although Breton stays with Freud's interpretation of dreams⁸). In addition to the romantic ruins, 'modern *mannequins*' are also cited by Breton as

⁷ Adorno in particular rejects psychoanalytic readings of the Surrealist mapping of the city, giving a Marxist reading of the object as commodity fetish. (2004, 231)

⁸ Breton admits to being 'completely preoccupied with Freud' and 'familiar with his methods of examination' (2010, 22).

marvellous apparitions of the modern day. They represent the mechanised reproduction and commodification of the human form, and to Foster they recall Hoffman's creepy Ophelia. Undoubtedly, Breton's *merveilleux* has psychological, socio-historical and mechanical implications: the Freudian mining of the unconscious for opening up meaning (as opposed to Freud's result-driven method of analysis); the subversion of social reality via the irrational and self-conscious pastiche; and the Ernstian model of juxtaposition and montage that we later see informing Surrealist cinema. Within each of these resides the sensation of disorientation: 'of being out of one's element [...] Without *dépaysement*, there is no *merveilleux*, no encounter with the marvelous, the objective of all surrealist activity' (Cauvin 'Introduction', 1982, xvii). In his self-professed 'anti-novel' *Nadja* (1928)⁹ Breton deliberately sets about recording his experiences of *dépaysement*, writing of the extraordinary coincidences that erupt into his daily routines and cause him to feel by turn uneasy or elated. Louis Aragon two years earlier, in his novel *Le Payasan de Paris* [Paris Peasant, 1926], similarly charts his encounters with the city as he passes through it each day or night.

Nocturnal Paris presents a secret underworld filled with characters, but more significant to the *merveilleux* is the metamorphosis of the object in the darkened or artificially illuminated streets. A photographic counterpart to Aragon and Breton's rambling accounts of the Parisian streets can be found in the images of the Hungarian artist Gyula Halász (more commonly known by his pseudonym George Brassai, 1899-1984). In what Richard Stamelman has called a 'chiaroscuro of the marvelous', (2006, 70) Brassai's photographs use light and shadow to transform the ordinary. In an interview he explains how 'People thought my photographs were "surrealist" because they showed a ghostly, unreal Paris, shrouded in fog and darkness. And yet the surrealism of my pictures was only reality made more eerie by my way of seeing' (Brassai 2004, 98).

⁹ *Nadja* tells the story of Breton's chance meeting, and subsequent relationship with a young woman, Léona Camille Ghislaine D, quoted by Breton as having chosen the name Nadja 'because in Russian it's the beginning of the word hope, and because it's only the beginning.' (66) The motif of returning to the beginning runs through the text, a ceaseless cycle from which Nadja and Breton are unable to free themselves. The novel includes 44 plates of various photographs and drawings; Breton's self-conscious narrator announces a semblance of order: 'I intend to mention, in the margin of the narrative I have yet to relate, only the most decisive episodes of my life.' (Breton 19), yet the episodes themselves are based on contingent and marvellous events that blur the boundary between fact and fiction.

Breton includes four of Brassai's photographs in *L'Amour fou* to accompany a descriptive passage of a long night walk, during which he is seized with thoughts about the 'phantasmagoria' of love prompted by the 'spectacle' of objects protruding from the skyline and spilling from the marketplace. Brassai's photograph of early morning traders depositing vegetables onto sidewalks 'gleaming with horrendous garbage' (Breton 1988, 45) exceeds Breton's description. Held motionless within the cramped frame, the expressionless men fade into the background, while the light from inside a shop illuminates the sacks of food with unnatural brightness. A row of shops on the opposite side of the street are shrouded in fog. The opaque *grisaille* of the fog has the same effect as that created in Expressionist cinema, of making the objects in front of the lens seem artificial, but whereas many of the film sets were fake, Brassai selects the most mundane of street scenes as subjects. A skeletal tree through the soft grey mist, the tips of its branches tinged with light cast from the shop, recalls the uncanny animation of static objects by a flash of lightning.

This purposeful engagement with the city is characteristic of a surrealist sensibility drawn to 'the state of bemusement and incipient illumination which arises within certain settings, defined as *lieux électifs* - elective places, or sites conducive to the marvelous.' (Cardinal 2009, 36) As suddenly as a 'blue wind' passes through the trees, (Breton, 84) or an ordinary pane of glass is astonishingly transformed by a 'greenish, almost submarine light, the source of which remained invisible' (Aragon 1994, 22), the real metamorphoses into something rare and irrational. An almost gothic atmosphere reflects the paranoia of the narrators, rendering certain places frightening. For example an irreducible memory – the words on a shop awning – reminds Breton of an earlier phrase from *Champs magnétiques*, which later that night causes him to draw a morbid comparison with the statue of Jean-Jacques Rousseau¹⁰ outside his window. *Nadja* is a text obsessed with questions of subjectivity and *dépaysement*, beginning with the questions, Who am I? Who do I haunt? Like *Paris Peasant*, it traces the links between personal apprehension and haphazard clues from the exterior world. Enigma seems to pull Breton forward, a mutual fascination that

¹⁰ For a historical analysis of the statues and locations in *Nadja*, see Chapter 4 in Margaret Cohen, 1993. "Qui suis-je?" Nadja's Haunting Subject, in *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution*, Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

he shares with de Chirico. The painter's sense of 'surprise' at the world inspires Breton, who sees in it a search for which there are no answers: 'As far as I am concerned, a mind's arrangement with regard to certain objects is even more important than its regard for certain arrangements of objects' (1999, 16).

As images from dreams, fleeting memories, and fantasies flicker across some inner membrane, their material equivalents populate the exterior world. 1920s Paris was rapidly changing, yet its historical past was inscribed everywhere, not only in ancient buildings and statues set in stone, but also in the ephemeral objects displayed at the many flea markets. This incoherent juxtaposition draws Breton back to de Chirico – the glove, the sunglasses and bananas next to the classical columns and Roman figures. The found object or *trouvaille*, 'whether it be artistic, scientific, philosophic, or as useless as anything, is enough to undo the beauty of everything beside it. In it alone can we recognize the marvelous precipitate of desire' (Breton 1988, 15). The historical significance of urban renewal in Europe's big cities prompts the interpretation of such objects as 'fetishes – commodity fetishes – on which something subjective, libido, was once fixated' (Adorno [1956] quoted in Caws 2004, 231). From the recycled newspaper headlines of Dada montage and Surrealist automatism, to commercial advertising, tickets, notices and shop mannequins, the *merveilleux* situates searches out the illogical connections that drive human desire. *Nadja* and *Paris Peasant* are, as Michael Richardson has argued, "documents" of encounter' (2006, 77), but the evidence they document – the minutiae of Parisian life in the late 1920s – is, according to Adorno, comprised of 'historical images in which the subject's innermost core becomes aware that it is something external, an imitation of something social and historical' (Adorno 2004, 231). The *merveilleux* prevents these images from becoming empty simulacra, illuminating the possible relation of the object to its psycho and socio-historical context. This presents a more directly radical approach to the real than was ever attempted in Neue Sachlichkeit, and which was never explicitly discussed other than in aesthetic terms in Roh's *magischer Realismus*. Surrealist texts personalise, or psychoanalyse their objects, highlighting the social meaning, whereas Roh's *Nach-Expressionismus*, despite its emphasis on sensation and perception, only provides technical and art historical *schema* to explicate images.

As Jean-Pierre Cauvin proposes: ‘the marvelous and the surreal are seldom immediately perceived, let alone understood. It is their irruption into our consciousness, however fleeting, however flickering, that matters’ (1982, xxxviii). The *merveilleux*, for Breton, reminds us of what we desire, and the Surrealists believe that the mind must be in a constant state of readiness - ‘état d’attente’ - for the object to properly materialise. Surrealism and magic realism both require that imagination and physical reality converge in order for the marvellous to have effect (and affect), and although Roh dismisses the *élan vital* as too subjective a force in *Nach-Expressionismus*, by the time of *Foto-Auge* his views are much closer to those of the Surrealists. Breton’s theories circumnavigate the theme of desire in which the erotic and the materialistic converge, and it is significant that he should choose the medium of photography to act as illustration for his ideas in *Nadja* and *L’amour fou*. To conclude this section, I will examine the concept of convulsive beauty, and the Bretonian lexicon of technical devices used to describe the psychodynamics of the *merveilleux*.

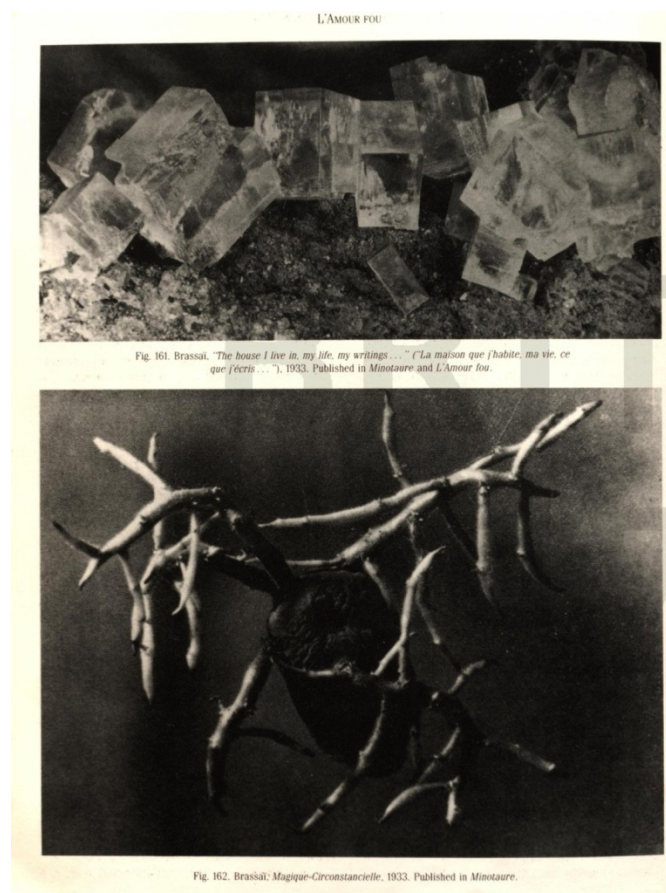


Figure 28: Brassai, photographs of the magic-circumstantial, taken from *Photography and Surrealism*, Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingstone (eds.) New York, Corcoran Gallery of Art: Washington and Abbeville Press, 1985

Firstly, let us examine a geological photograph of a crystalline formation of mineral deposits taken by Brassai. The black and white close-up accompanies Breton's theorisation of 'convulsive beauty' (1988, 10) which refers to the tension created between an object in repose (static) and an object in motion. He is fascinated by the gradual petrification of objects over time, such as water droplets solidified into lime deposits, or a fountain of water transformed into a seemingly solid form by the camera. The epitome of this link between animate and inanimate states is the crystal: the microscopic crystals that form ice and frost, and the mineral deposits of rock salts. 'The work of art, just like just like any fragment of human life considered in its deepest meaning, seems to me devoid of value if it does not offer the hardness, the rigidity, the regularity, the lustre on every interior and exterior facet, of the crystal' (1988, 11). As Mary Ann Caws has argued, the crystal is emblematic of 'the whole Surrealist morality' (2004), or at least of Breton's. The property of crystal, hard yet subject to transformation through changes in the light, atmospheric conditions, or through manufacture, illustrates the indeterminable point between stasis and motion, which can be metaphorically extended to include the charged exchange of desire that transforms the reality of an object and therefore the boundary between fantasy and reality. Crystal according to Breton symbolises creation and transformation.

Within the state of convulsive beauty, Breton continues, we find the *explosante-fixe* [fixed-explosive], *magique-circonstancielle* [magic-circumstantial] and the *érotique-voilée* [veiled-erotic] (1988, 19). The *explosante-fixe* refers to the cessation of movement, of petrification, for example, and is illustrated in Man Ray's 1934 photograph of a dancer. The photograph has captured the woman mid dance, her costume fanned out in a blur around her; it exudes a strong energy in the suggestion of movement in her clothes and her arms held aloft in the air. Continuing Breton's example of the transformation of the animate into the inanimate as liquid becomes solid, movement becomes trace. The *érotique-voilée* refers to the omnipresence of desire and the imaginary images created in fantasy, neurosis or premonition: thought is capable of transforming any material object. Lastly, the *magique-circonstancielle* corresponds to the contingent magic of circumstance that we have seen at work in Brassai's photography or in the

practice of automatic writing, flea-market shopping and rambling through the streets. In each of these examples, Breton works through the affect that things have on him, the unsettling yet beautiful *merveilleux*, the crucible holding each facet of a reality constantly in flux, yet solid as crystal. Surrealist methodology and practice differs greatly from *magischer realismus*, and yet the subject of both remains the twilight threshold between inner and outer reality.



Figure 29: Man Ray, Explosante-fixe, 1934, Man Ray- Explosante fixe, 1934, published in 'Minotaure' No.5, 1934, and reproduced in André Breton, L'Amour fou, Paris: Gallimard, [1937]

In his evocative introduction to an edited collection of Surrealists' writing on the cinema, Paul Hammond draws attention to the importance of Surrealist cinema as a poetics with a utopian aim. He proposes the possibility that it is a 'countersimulacrum', and its practitioners, sensing that 'life is elsewhere' (Hammond, 'Available Light' 2000, 42), attempt to create a diegetic space in which both physical and mental aspects of this life 'elsewhere' are considered through suggestive contingencies and irrational connections. This suggestion that Surrealist poetics create a 'countersimulacrum' fits well with the definition of the marvellous as an agent of metamorphosis. It does not go so far as to

suggest a fantastic or virtual world beyond the real, but recognises cinema's ability to emulate the exchange that takes place when human interaction (physical and mental) changes objective reality. Buñuel, for example, found the cinema to be:

the finest instrument there is for expressing the world of dreams, of the emotions, of instinct. [In which] chronological order and relative values of duration no longer correspond to reality ... in order to express the subconscious life that so deeply penetrates poetry with its roots (Buñuel, 'The Cinema, Instrument of Poetry' 2000, 114-114).

The goal to represent life as 'elsewhere', outside the confines of hegemonic capitalism, that Hammond ascribes to Surrealist cinema is nevertheless a goal rooted in real, felt, experience. The poetry comes from the sensations of surprise, shock, familiarity, and disorientation that the diegetic images evoke; condensed symbols that remain unchained for the spectator to freely associate with. Advertising billboards or a certain kind of light revealed marvelous aspects of the Parisian streets to Breton, but he had already prepared his mind to be in an 'état d'attente' to receive the signs. The darkened rooms of public film screenings provided the 'état d'attente' for the spectator to contemplate films; all Surrealists needed to do was to make or find films that attempted to, or seemed to, articulate the rapid 'outbursts' of passionate and changing times, as Phillipe Soupault put it (Soupault 2000, 56).

In an essay on the marvellous in film, Ado Kyrrou gives a reading of Vittorio de Sica's *Miracle in Milan* (Italy, 1951) that I find to be a most succinct definition of the cinematic marvellous. He explains how in de Sica's film about the 'magical' transformation of a Milano shanty town, 'From the first moments we are gripped by the whimsical freedom of the images; the most exquisite poetry tears down the veils of reality one by one to introduce us to the purest kind of marvelous' (Kyrrou, 'The Fantastic - the Marvelous' [1963] 2000, 159). Here the marvellous is active, it 'tears down' the illusory veils of social existence, it grips our attention, and it frees images from temporal and spatial constraints, mediated through Kyrrou's Surrealist awareness.

Breton's domineering personality and shaky political stance were ultimately responsible for the splintering of French Surrealism, but his preoccupation with the eruption of the marvelous and his remarkable attempts to wrestle the indeterminate into words had a far-reaching influence on magic realism and discussions of the marvellous in film¹¹. For Carpentier in particular, introduced to Breton's inner circle by Surrealist poet Robert Desnos, the artists and film art directors that he met and the modern marvel of avant-garde film were undeniably influential. In fact, although his writing is primarily shaped by a profound knowledge of literature and music, Carpentier's descriptions of cinematic encounters, of the use of light and space in certain films, seem too have informed the descriptions of light, of dynamic movement and incongruous narrative juxtapositions in his novels. The culture of French Surrealism and its embracing of film art and technical innovation was an integral part of Carpentier's European *weltanschauung*. Rather than rejecting this influence, as Carpentier attempted to do, if we accept it, then an alternative, transhistorical reading of his chronicle-manifesto *lo real maravilloso americano* is made possible. Moreover, this alternative reading allows for an intermedial approach to the mode that includes film and the plastic arts rather than focusing mainly on literature.

iii. Alejo Carpentier: El cubano en Paris

Paris, after the Exposition of 1900, seemed to symbolize the pinnacle of culture. The men of the Americas, poets, painters, thinkers, musicians, would go, like larks mesmerized by a mirror, toward the City of Light (Carpentier [1946] 2001, 247).

Alejo Carpentier spent his early childhood in Havana, but his prosperous French father and Russian mother offered him the luxuries of international travel from his youth; and thanks to their interest in architecture and music, he became well-versed in European arts. But, despite being brought up to speak French, and brief spells of schooling in Europe, Carpentier always identified himself with Cuba. In the words of literary critic Stephen Henighan: 'Carpentier's life oscillated between the poles of French sophistication and rural folklore'

¹¹ In *L'Age du cinema* (4-5 August-November 1951) 'The Surrealist Group' published a list of directors and films under the headings 'See' and 'Don't See'. This list demonstrates that a Surrealist perspective allowed for films that were not exclusively made by Surrealists to be viewed as part of their wider aim for cinema. See Hammond 2000, 46-47.

(Henighan, 2000, 139), from playing with the children of Afro-Cuban workers and Mayan Indians on his father's ranch in El Lucero, to the bookshelves of his father's French literature collection. Both the contrasts and the similarities between these disparate cultures are later expressed in his writing, particularly in film criticism written for Cuban, French and Venezuelan publications.

After graduating from university in Havana, where he studied architecture, Carpentier commenced writing for various journals (*revista de avance*, *Social*, *Carteles*), engaging with ideological debates involving Cuban independence and asserting his belief that avant-garde art and nationalism go hand in hand¹². However, his articles were often discussions of European, rather than Latin American literature and art. His 1925 article entitled 'Jean Cocteau y la Estética del Ambiente' [Jean Cocteau and the aesthetics of the environment] in *Social* (a journal to which he had been contributing articles on the French avant-garde since 1924) provides an early example of his exploration of modernist aesthetics. He asserts that 'Modernism itself does not exist; there is only a flow of virgin emotions that occurs in each moment, a flow that only has use for the true poet, and which should lead to art in accordance with our sensibility.'¹³ This continuous flow constitutes Carpentier's earliest conception of the marvellous (he attributes the word 'maravilloso' to it, 28). Cocteau's poetic translations are argued to reflect the modern environment and malaise of the early twentieth century, and to bridge thought and the exterior world. In Cocteau's plays, Carpentier discovers a *mise en scène* that throws the ordinary into new light; his angels, absurd tableaux, cruelty, games, and strange objects, though incongruous, collectively form a cultural commentary, images which derive from the poet's interior flow, resulting in 'the perfect exteriorisation of his thoughts' (28).¹⁴ It is significant that he should use a similar terminology to describe Cocteau's poetry as that Murnau used to define his impulse to photograph

¹² *revista de avance* includes essays on avant-garde writers and artists from Europe and North America, but also expresses a self-awareness of the dangers of such an influence, printing a questionnaire to find out their readers' opinions regarding non-Cuban avant-garde art entitled 'Qué debe ser el arte americano?' [What should American art be?] see *Revista de Avance* 2, No. 26 (1928) 235

¹³ 'El modernismo en sí no existe; hay solamente en cada momento un caudal de emociones vírgenes que es necesario hacer perceptibles; un *fluido* únicamente utilizable para el verdadero poeta, y que debe originar un arte de acuerdo con nuestra sensibilidad', Carpentier, [7 July, 1925], 1975b, 28

¹⁴ 'una perfecta exteriorización de su pensamiento'.

thought. In my opinion, the cinematic apparatus was already transforming the way in which playwrights and writers developed their ideas, and therefore Carpentier's marvellous – conceived of within this 'sensitivity' of flowing thoughts and images – is influenced strongly by cinematic aesthetics.

In 1926 Carpentier travelled to Mexico, meeting Diego Rivera and José Clement Orozco and encountering the revolutionary impetus of these artists' work.

(García-Carranza 1979, 7) The following year, Carpentier co-signed the *Grupo Minorista's*¹⁵ manifesto, which was published in the first issue of the *revista de avance*, Havana, a radical journal that he co-edited with four others. The declaration underlined the group's support for the Afro-Cuban population and Cuban economic independence from the United States; the wider aim of the journal was to review new forms of art, emerging from the contributors' 'intense desire to recuperate all the traditions depreciated by the bourgeoisie'¹⁶ (Brennan 2001, 11) For his involvement in the publication of the journal Carpentier was accused of Communism and of opposing General Machado's dictatorship (1924-1933), and served seven months in prison (García-Carranza 1979, 5).

In 1928, Desnos visited Havana for the Seventh Congress of the Latin American Press, during which time he met Carpentier, who impressed him with his knowledge of Afro-Cuban music. Desnos later wrote:¹⁷

I have never forgotten the poor village close to Havana where Alejo Carpentier [...] led me the very night of my arrival. Two deafening orchestras duelled in grand style. Above it all, an immense plaintive wail of trombones passed over a sonic background of strange instruments and the drone of the sea (Dumas 1980, 136)

Desnos and Carpentier struck up an immediate friendship and Carpentier was able to return to France, thus evading the increasingly alarming levels of censorship administered by the Machado regime. So as not to attract attention

¹⁵ Carpentier described the *Grupo Minorista* as follows: 'Without aiming to create a movement, *minorismo* quickly became a spiritual climate. Thanks to its efforts, exhibitions, concerts, and lecture cycles were organized; magazines were published; personal contact with intellectuals in Europe and the Americas were established, which represented new ways of thinking and seeing.' [1946] 2001 quoted in Brennan 26

¹⁶ According to Brennan, from the days of the *revista de avance* and the *Grupo Minorista*, 'the black question was raised loudly, but not exotically. The Minoristas saw black culture as an important way of simply saying 'No'.

¹⁷ Carpentier mentions how Desnos wrote an article inspired by his experience in Havana, 'La admirable música cubana' for *Le Soir*, quoted in *Conversaciones*, 1998, 182

with Cuban identity papers, Desnos offered Carpentier his passport to travel and later boarded the same boat, claiming to have lost his papers (Carpentier 1985, 77-78). They arrived in Paris, where Carpentier lived and worked for the next eleven years in the company of fellow Latin American journalists and, thanks to Desnos¹⁸, a number of prominent artists and Surrealists, among them de Chirico, Tzara, Eluard, Michel Leiris, Breton, and Prévert. (1985, 119)

While in Paris, Carpentier continued writing for the Cuban avant-garde journal *Carteles*, (which served largely to inform artists and intellectuals back in Havana of current European cultural trends¹⁹) relaying cultural news from his critical perspective in the midst of Surrealist activity. Carpentier was fascinated by the magical medium of cinema, and his film reviews for *Social* and *Carteles* written between 1925 and 1931 (a period, we should note, during which Roh published both *Nach-Expressionismus* and *Foto-Auge*) discuss avant-garde cinema made by friends such as Desnos, Man Ray, and Buñuel, and offer detailed considerations of cinema as an important medium for investigating realism. As we have already discussed, the cinema as a form of modern magic plays a significant part in materialising the dynamism of magic realism – of making thought visible. Within the Surrealist group and its associates, there were filmmakers (such as Buñuel, Dalí, Man Ray, René Clair, Francis Picabia) who arguably brought automatism and magic to the screen, creating oneiric and fantastic images through their explorations of the medium. Although Carpentier's main interest lies with literature and music, he is fascinated by the cinema's potential, both aesthetically and as a political tool. Living in Paris meant that he could see avant-garde films not shown in Havana. His thoughts on Eisenstein, Chaplin, Disney and Cocteau overlap with concurrent criticism written by the Surrealists, by French film theorists, and by the critics discussed in Chapter One, further illustrating the importance of the cinematic medium for any theoretical exploration of the intersection of reality and fantasy, and the portrayal of the object.

¹⁸ Accounts of Desnos and Carpentier's relationship are recounted in various sources, most notably: Marie-Claire Dumas (ed.) *Robert Desnos*, 1987, and *Oeuvres*, 1999, and Katharine Conley, 2003, *Robert Desnos, Surrealism, and the Marvellous in Everyday Life*.

¹⁹ For details of his later articles on cinema see appendix iii-1.

The first in his series of film criticism, 'El cine en la nueva Rusia', (7 October, 1928) considers the Russian film industry, the Sovkino²⁰ infrastructure and the greatness of Eisenstein (who he later met in Paris), Vsevolod Pudovkin (1893-1953), and Dziga Vertov. The article is a response to French film critic Léon Moussinac's (1890-1964) essay '*Le cinéma soviétique*' (1928). Moussinac was an important figure in French film circles, having established the Club Français du Cinéma and promoted the screening of Soviet films in Paris. His clear admiration for the educational and political properties of 1920s Russian cinema chimed with Carpentier's own, both critics sharing Communist sensibilities. In his article, Carpentier recalls Lenin's assertion that cinema is the most important of all the arts, an argument that he considers answered by Moussinac's essay which discusses the educational value and the revolutionary impact of Soviet films. Inspired by Moussinac's account of the studio system in Russia, Carpentier relays to his readers the rigorous systematisation of labour and education that Sovkino provides, and contrasts its high ideological aims with those of Hollywood – for the thousands of 'sleep-inducing' North American films produced in a year (346), Sovkino may make only three. It is significant that of all the films Carpentier cites in these articles, Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) is the only one that he mentions having seen in Havana, a film that no doubt for Cubans endorsed the anti Machado sentiment at that time. *Potemkin* seemed to surpass anything Carpentier had seen in other national cinemas, and symbolised the 'powerful and authoritative vehicle of ideas' that he believed the Soviet film industry could be (1976b, 347). He found it surprising to see 'coming out of the new Russian film industry - an industry without a history, an industry that had encountered all the difficulties imaginable - a production so perfect, a film that in one fell swoop came to be situated amongst the twenty masterpieces that this art of shadows has given us since the beginning of this century' (346)²¹. It is very likely that Carpentier saw parallels between the socio-political predicaments facing the Soviet Union and Latin America, and later, when he returned to Cuba,

²⁰ Sovkino was founded in 1925, and later split into two separate studios, *Lenfilm* and *Mosfilm* in 1930.

²¹ 'Y era sorprendente ver salir de la novel industria cinematografía rusa - industria sin tradición, industria que tropezaba con todas las dificultades imaginables - una producción tan perfecta un *film* que venía a situarse, de un solo golpe, entre las veinte obras maestras que el arte de las sombras en movimiento ha podido darnos, desde principios de este siglo.' 1976b, 346

he appropriated film for his own ideological ends in a series of ‘talking heads’ portraits that tell his story directly to the camera.

Carpentier regarded the first ‘star’ directors (‘*estrellas*’, 347) as products of the Russian film industry, and considered Sovkino and its auspices to be in a large part responsible for the evolution of formal innovations which were privileged above plot or action. Agreeing with Moussinac, he admires the way in which national struggle is represented through the rural peasantry (in Eisenstein’s *Strike* (1925), for example) rather than through the literal portrayal of canons and warfare. Of further note in this article, is Carpentier’s reference to cinema as the tenth muse, ‘la decima musa’²², and ‘the apostle of new ideas’ [el apóstol de las nuevas ideas] (347). In classical mythology there are nine muses, goddesses who came to represent various arts and sciences: Calliope muse of epic song; Clio muse of history; Euterpe muse of lyric song; Melpomene muse of tragedy; Terpsichore muse of dance; Erato muse of erotic poetry; Polyhymia muse of sacred song; Urania muse of astrology; and Thalia muse of comedy. There are numerous interpretations of the tenth muse - Plato refers to Sappho as the tenth muse, and in Sonnet XXXVIII, Shakespeare writes:

Be thou the tenth Muse:

Ten times more in worth

Than those old nine which rhymers invoke

Carpentier’s use of the concept descends from Cocteau’s, which begins with his line ‘FILM, the new muse’²³. Cocteau likens cinema to a tenth muse, a new muse, a medium without history, that exceeds the attempts of all other forms of art to depict: ‘unreal realism, something truer than truth [...] which, one day will be recognised as the distinguishing mark of our age’; for ‘allowing us to dream the same dream together’ (1994a, 176-177). Many years later in an article entitled

²² At the time of completing this thesis, an ICAIC-published anthology of Carpentier’s film criticism entitle *La decima musa* became available in Cuba. Unfortunately no electronic access or hard copy of the publication was available in the U.K. before submission. The full title is *El cine decima musa: Alejo Carpentier* compiled by Salvador Arias, Havana, 2011. In addition to already published articles from *Carteles* and those published in *Letra y solfa*, it includes articles on Orson Welles’s *Citizen Kane* and other writing on Mexican and Cuban films.

²³ First published in an anthology of poems, *Poésies (1917-1920)*, Paris: Editions de la Sirene, and cited in Bernard and Gauteur, 2001, 22

‘Le Testament D’Orphée, (which discusses his film of the same name, and of which extracts first appeared in 1959), Cocteau explains that he had often been asked to divulge the meaning of his films, and that viewers had often found them to be unfathomable, unable to put into words the ‘*something else*’ that they saw on screen. Reminiscent of an earlier definition of *magischer realismus*, in which Roh describes ‘something’ mysterious evoked in the paintings, Cocteau argues that his abstract cinematic poetry ‘should not give form to a thought but to *thought* itself, that unknown force’ (1994b, 169); and that ‘when it comes down to it [...] “something else” is the best definition of poetry’ (1994b, 167). Cocteau is not alone in his definition, it being a fairly common (and ultimately frustrating) phrase to describe the indeterminate elements of the *merveilleux*, which, reading between the lines, correspond to unknown, profound, mysterious eruptions in the mind brought to the surface through spectatorial interaction. Ado Kyrrou calls for cinema to explore the unexplored, and to mine the extraordinary elements beneath the surface of everyday life: ‘Eroticism, imagination, exaltation, infernal tension are the elements of a cinema that will have at last rejected the void to forever advance with giant strides toward “something else”’²⁴. Cocteau locates poetry within the functioning of thought, thereby providing a definition that subverts the logic of social hegemonic structure based on patterns assigned a rationale. Similarly Kyrrou’s ‘something else’ points away from the emptiness at the heart of modern life towards a life with no controlling structure other than that of a constantly shifting alternative. In my opinion, this utopian impulse to work against the grain of rationalised, socialised experience parallels Carpentier’s desire to express a ‘kingdom not of this world’. Despite his later rejection of Surrealism, I believe that Carpentier’s ideas are those of an artist with a Surrealist awareness. It is evident from these examples that what Carpentier takes to be a heavily self-conscious ‘manufactured’ in Surrealism, is far from the mark. Carpentier and the Surrealists were, in fact, united in their goal to link their worlds to pre-social, instinctual, irrational, and often unknowable patterns that offer an alternative reality.

Cinematic poetry for Carpentier also meant representation of the intangible, non-material, and transient. Cocteau’s imagining of cinema as the ‘new’ or

²⁴ Excerpt taken from Kyrrou’s 1951 essay ‘Romanticism and Cinema’, and cited in Hammond ‘Available Light’, 2000, 4.

'young' muse of the arts parallels Ricciotti Canudo's 1912 essay on cinema entitled 'Reflections of the Seventh Art' (the follow-up to his 1911 'The Birth of the Sixth Art', and not published until 1923²⁵), which evinces cinema's unique ability to capture ordinariness and to synthesise fantasy and reality: 'we will recognize cinema as the synthesis of all the arts and of the profound impulse underlying them [... it] will be able to construct the synthesis-temple of our intense inner life ... by means of the incomparable findings of Science' (293-294). Carpentier, influenced by this early film criticism, readily adopts the terminology and follows suit in his insistence on drawing the line between cinema and other plastic arts.

iv. The Tenth Muse: Carpentier's Avant-Garde Marvellous

Thus, contrary to literary criticism which dates the Carpentierian *maravilloso* to 1949, and the manifesto-prologue of his novel *El reino de este mundo*, Carpentier had already alluded to the marvellous in his discussion of Cocteau's poetic sensibility in *Social* in 1925. His definition of a marvellous fluidity of movement, between the poet's apprehension of the exterior world and his emotional reaction, alludes, like Cocteau and Canudo, to cinema's ability to capture the invisible and thus 'unreal' aspects of reality. Carpentier's theorisation of the marvellous, then, begins with poetry, theatre, Surrealism, and cinema, and not the style of the novel that he instigates more than twenty years later. Jason Borge is the first critic to address Carpentier's *cinematic* marvellous in the English language, rightly tracing the concept back to Carpentier's article 'La Cinematografía De Avanzada', [Avant-garde Cinema] which was published in *Carteles*, November 4, 1928 (although overlooking the earlier article on Cocteau). Borge notes how Carpentier describes the cinema as a 'world of marvels', the camera as 'a glass eye of magical virtues' (2008, 139), but only partially discusses ideas that arise in 'Avant-garde cinema' (which he translates as 'cutting-edge' cinema) as an introduction to his analysis of 'Disney's aesthetic appeal to Spanish-American *vanguardistas*' (2008, 151) later in the 1940s.

Carpentier begins 'Avant-garde cinema' with a nod to Louis Aragon's 'Traite du style' [Treatise on Style], also published in 1928. He briefly reflects on Aragon's

²⁵ Carpentier seems not to distinguish too strongly between these two terms, as he uses Canudo's 'séptimo arte' to describe film in 1933. (1976b, 538)

argument that one cannot predict the ‘unexpected factors’ that will emerge during a given period, nor in which direction a culture will turn. For Carpentier, cinema, the tenth muse, is one of these ‘unexpected factors’ (1976b, 352): ‘the first form of art to enable a mobilisation of the absurd. And the absurd is an organised force; the very same force as that of the marvellous’²⁶ (1978b, 355). In words that are remarkably similar to those written by Roh, Carpentier marvels at how photography and film bring out mysterious and unknown qualities in objects that we encounter every day. The cinema, he says, functions like a ‘metafora moderna’ (modern metaphor) in that it surprises us by bringing disparate things together (1978b, 354). His ‘modern metaphor’ describes the art of cinematic montage, but also the Surrealist *merveilleux* and the shock of juxtaposition rather than the seamless flow of illusory montage that came to define mainstream filmmaking. His article is an impassioned response to the marvel of avant-garde cinema, describing images dancing in the light to a symphony of nuanced shades. Perhaps most significantly he declares his faith in the cinema to reveal ‘la vida oculta y misteriosa del mundo’ (the hidden and mysterious life of the exterior world). Photography, he says, has the ability to reveal the aspects of everyday objects that habit has blinded us to (1978b, 356). Carpentier’s view of avant-garde cinema parallels Roh’s, and this should not be forgotten or rejected in any eagerness to separate the European and Latin American versions of the marvellous in which *lo realismo maravilloso* simply becomes ‘the ideal of recuperating ritual in its prereflexive state, uncorrupted by a self-conscious and disbelieving civilisation’ and ‘is not accessible to technique and artifice’ (Camayd-Freixas 2000, 128-129).

Given that the majority of avant-garde films were not originally shown in Cuba at the time of their release, Carpentier is overwhelmed by the favourable response to art cinema in Paris, and to theatres devoted entirely to showing these films. He also marvels at ‘exotic’ films from China or Japan that bring remote places and rare scenes into his local cinema. Ultimately, in his essay on avant-garde film, Carpentier is looking ahead, fully invested in cinema’s future cultural potential: ‘Do not forget that the Tenth Muse was born many centuries after her Augustan

²⁶ ‘el primer arte que permite una movilización de lo absurdo. Y el absurdo organizado es una fuerza: la fuerza misma de lo maravilloso’ (my translation), originally published in *Carteles*, on the 4th of November, 1928.

sisters, and that twenty-five years of life is quite a small thing.’²⁷ In an article written later in the same year, (‘Glosas [Comments] De Un Festival Chaplin’), following articles written by Breton, Ado Kyrrou (1923-1985), and Buñuel (to name a few), Carpentier extols the universal appeal of Chaplin’s films, which he describes as poetic creations, brilliant mimes, which ‘pull on the most painful strings of our sensibility’²⁸ (1978b, 361). Noting that of the ten avant-gardes cinemas in Paris, all of them were showing a range of Chaplin’s films in 1928, he attributes this success to their relevancy to the lives of ordinary people. For Carpentier, Chaplin’s episodic films ‘together form the biggest and most authentic picaresque novel of our era’²⁹

Carpentier believed Chaplin and Cocteau to be poetic masters of the cinema, but without question it is the films of Man Ray and Buñuel that capture his imagination, due to their recasting of reality. In 1928 Carpentier writes that Man Ray’s *L’étoile de mer* [The Starfish, 1928], a collaboration with Desnos, has an inexhaustible fantasy and dynamism. The magic of the film’s ‘contingent elements’, of images that oscillate between dream and reality perplexes Carpentier.³⁰ He describes a camera-eye that violates any inert material object, an apparatus that captures every slow movement, even the slow stretch of a starfish. The result is ‘a counterpoint’³¹ of crystal objects that spin simultaneously’, teaching the viewer to see reality anew (1976b, 80). There is no escaping the similarity that these words have to Breton’s definition of the ‘fixed-explosive’ in *L’amour fou*, but this is unsurprising as most critics of the avant-garde were fascinated by the contrapuntal tension that photographing or filming both animate and inanimate objects creates. Carpentier does not specifically mention

²⁷ ‘no olvidar que la Decima Musa ha nacido muchos siglos después de sus augustas hermanas, y que veinticinco años de vida, para una musa, es bien poca cosa’, 1976b, 357

²⁸ ‘el mimo genial palp alas cuerdas más dolorosas de nuestra sensibilidad’, 1978b, 361

²⁹ ‘que forman la más grande y auténtica novela picaresca de nuestra época.’, Carpentier, ‘Glosas De Un Festival Chaplin’, *Carteles*, 16 de diciembre de 1928, 358

³⁰ Carpentier, ‘Man Ray: Pintor y Cineasta de Vanguardia’, *Social*, Vol. 13: 7, June 1928, quoted in Carpentier, 1976b, 80

³¹ Counterpoint, or *contrapunto*, is a term used by Cuban historian Fernando Ortiz to describe the modernisation process that altered Cuban manufacture forever. In counterpoint to the harvesting of tobacco ‘the voluntary gift of nature’ used by the natives, he pits the feudal labour and manufacture brought by the coloniser in the form of the sugar plantation. Sugar, he argues can only be produced through labour and machinery: see Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, 1940. Carpentier often uses Ortiz’s term to express dynamism between two distinct concepts, be those in musical composition, painting, film or a sociological definition of ethnic difference.

Desnos' cameo in the film, or his poem on which the scenario is based; he is captivated by the images, their rhythmic progression and distortion through filters. In Kim Knowles' analysis of the film she describes how 'Man Ray does not aim to shock the viewer with outright incongruity, but instead attempts to create an atmosphere in which reality is only slightly out of synch with the way it is traditionally presented in the cinema' (2009, 161). For Carpentier the off-kilter magic of Man Ray's film shows the spectator reality's hidden side.

After a visit to Man Ray's photographic studio in Montparnasse, Carpentier excitedly described it as an 'alchemist's laboratory [...] filled with cameras, lenses, chassis, light fixtures like surgical instruments, complex tripods resembling insects'³² (1976a, 81). He was clearly sensitive to the effect of film and fascinated by its technicality, and also to the psychological affect produced as the viewer interacts with the images on screen.

Although he is perplexed by Man Ray's *L'étoile de mer*, Carpentier saw its potential to subvert spectatorial assumptions about reality and about cinema. His analysis of *Sovkino* reveals that he was also mindful of the cinema's potential for wider political impact. In an unpublished interview with friend and biographer Echevarría, Carpentier recalls how the Surrealists reacted to accusations that Buñuel's *L'Âge d'or* had purposely satirised and slandered the Italian monarchy³³. They immediately published a photo of the king and queen next to a still from the film, with the accompanying words 'The reality is much more horrifying' (Echevarría 2008, 99)³⁴. Carpentier was attracted to the provocative potential of the cinematic medium. In particular Buñuel's open attacks on Catholicism, his mockery of bourgeois values and figures of authority, themes that continued in both his European and Mexican films, were not only revolutionary for Franco-era Spain, but also for Latin American countries repressed by dictators and the Church. Carpentier's endorsement of both Man Ray and Buñuel's aesthetic is at odds with his criticism of art 'manufactured' for marvellous effect. Like Roh's

³² 'El laboratorio del alquimista ... Está llena de cámaras, lentes, *chassis*, de artefactos de luz parecidos a instrumentos de cirugía, de trípodes complicados que remedan insectos...' (1976a, 81)

³³ In his autobiography *My Last Sigh*, Buñuel remembers how the Italian embassy took offence at the banquet scene in which Valentine Hugo stands tall and elegant next to a man of diminutive stature. They believed this male character to be a reference to King Victor Emmanuel, who was also short in stature. (Buñuel 2003, 116-117)

³⁴ See 'Manifesto of the Surrealists Concerning *L'Âge d'or*' in Hammond, 2000, 182-189

endorsement of Ernst's provocative montage, Carpentier adopts Surrealist agency to shape his view of art and society.

Carpentier's accounts of his Parisian years reflect on Breton's role in the Surrealist movement, on automatic writing, on his own collaborations with Desnos and Antonin Artaud, and portray a vibrant social and cultural life. From his articles on Breton and Man Ray in *Social*, to articles on film and politics, and theatre reviews in *Carteles* and from his many interviews, we can piece together the paradoxical appeal that Surrealism held for Carpentier, paradoxical in that its shortcomings eventually inspired him to return to Cuba and 'write back'³⁵ to Europe. His view of Breton in particular varies between 1928 and his later interviews. In December 1928, for example, he wrote: 'If you read André Breton's admirable Surrealist Manifesto you will learn the secrets of a magic art', a discovery that Carpentier believed unprecedented since the literary work of 'Arturo' Rimbaud³⁶ ([1928] 1975, 106). Although Carpentier remained enthusiastic about Surrealist practice and its disruptive approach to realism, he later became sceptical of its leader and his bourgeois status, considering him affected. He notes, for example, that the majority of paintings used to illustrate the first edition of Breton's publication 'Surrealism and Painting' (1928), were mounted on the walls of his studio at 42 de la rue Fontaine. It particularly irked Carpentier that such wealth was coincidentally located in the building next to a much humbler Cuban music club (Carpentier, *Conversaciones*, [recorded during the 1970s] 1998, 223). This earned Breton the nickname of 'el Gran Pontifice del surrealismo' [the grand Pope of Surrealism] (Chao 1998, 222).

Nevertheless, the contacts that Carpentier made through Desnos enabled him to attune his own original ideas with those of artists who foregrounded chance,

³⁵ In their anthology *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft et al. present a collection of essays that address the postcolonial question of the colonised 'writing back' from the margins to the coloniser at the centre of their culture (the phrase was originally coined by Salman Rushdie). Developed from ideas in Edward Said's *Orientalism*, 1977; Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, 1994, and Gayatri Spivak's 'Can the subaltern speak', in Nelson and Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, 1988. 'writing back' has been adopted in magic realism studies to identify narrative strategies expressing marginality (Ouyang, 'Magic realism and beyond', 2005; Wakefield, 2004)

³⁶ 'Si lees el admirable *Manifiesto del surrealismo* de André Breton, sabrás los secretos de un arte mágico' (this and all further Spanish to English translations are my own unless otherwise stated.) Carpentier, 'En La Extrema Avanzada. Algunas Actitudes del "Surrealismo"' *Social*, Vol 13, no 12, (December, 1928) in Carpentier, *Crónicas Tomo I*, 1975

juxtaposition, shock and surprise in their work. These ideas crossed media boundaries and even though Carpentier was wary of the occult somnambulist practice of automatism favoured by Desnos, complaining that they wasted too much time ‘on activities playing on the circumstantial’³⁷, he adopted some of the methods himself. For example, Jacques Prévert, Desnos and Carpentier worked together on a radio programme under the title *Coq-a-L'âne* that followed the haphazard contingency of automatic writing. Prévert, as Carpentier recalls, would decide a topic such as ‘What happened to the whale?’ after which the following 15 minutes would be spent describing an imaginary scenario on air. (Chao 1998, 212) Carpentier also collaborated with Desnos in 1933 on a radio play of Desnos’ poem ‘La grande complainte de Fantômas’, directed by Antonin Artaud, for which Carpentier acted as musical director, arranging original music written by Kurt Weil as well as his own. Carpentier also claims to have worked with Artaud on a theatrical version of *Moctezuma* (Chao 1998, 212).

During this period Carpentier worked on various essays, music and theatrical productions that were to bring *cubanismo* and Latin American culture to Paris. In 1928 he staged his first play *Ecue Yamba-O, [Lord Praised be thou]* at the Théâtre Beriza, with music composed by Marius-François Gaillard. The burlesque tragedy, which describes the suffering of the Afro-Cuban population, was originally written as a novel while Carpentier was imprisoned. Its dramatization in Paris is evidence of Carpentier’s non-wavering commitment to put cultural oppression in Latin America at the centre of his work. Surrealism in the form conceived by Breton could never fully answer Carpentier’s desire for new ways of representing Latin American reality. He found more genuine inspiration from Desnos and Georges Bataille (1897-1962), with whom he corresponded for many years and to whose magazine *DOCUMENTS: Doctrines* (replaced in the 5th issue by *Variétés*), *Archéologie, Beaux-Arts, Ethnographie* [Doctrines (Variety), Archaeology, Fine Art, Ethnography] (1929-1931) he contributed³⁸.

The photographs, illustrations, paintings, essays, film stills and manuscripts that span the 15 issues of *DOCUMENTS* and their connection to Bataille’s writings, constitute a rich body of work that requires wider exploration than is possible

³⁷‘en actividades terriblemente circunscritas’

³⁸ Carpentier’s ‘Cuban Music’ appeared in the 6th Issue of *Documents* in 1929

here. Bataille's ideas regarding ethnographic art and objectivity, and the heterogeneity of the magazine's collective approach would later influence Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso americano*. In 1930, Bataille describes the social 'bankruptcy' and 'servitude' to commercial products that exemplifies the modern era, of a 'current powerlessness' in intellectual thought that shies away from facing dirt, death and decay in its preference for clever games involving chance.³⁹ In his implied critique of Surrealist practice, Bataille, as Dawn Ades and Fiona Bradley note, continually points to an idealisation and sublimation⁴⁰ of the 'base realities' of human thought: '*DOCUMENTS* utilised strategies of de-sublimation, allowing an unblinking stare at violence, sacrifice and seduction through which art was "brought down" to the level of other kinds of objects' (Ades and Bradley 200, 11). Eager to move on from what he deemed Breton's manufactured marvellous, Carpentier, guided by Desnos and Bataille, refuses to idealise Latin American culture or indigenous objects as materialisations of the concept of freedom, and in the spirit of *DOCUMENTS*, counters Breton's beautiful marvellous by highlighting the negative and violent sides of reality as well: 'The extraordinary is not necessarily beautiful or handsome; it is not beautiful or ugly; more than anything it is astonishing and rare. All that is rare and unusual, all that is breath-taking, all that is outside the established norms and rules is marvellous'⁴¹ (1998, 178). For Carpentier the smaller group of artists – he lists Bataille, Desnos, Artaud, Leiris, Prévert – was more to his taste than the bigger circle at 42 de la rue Fontaine, and their ideas (Artaud's theatre of cruelty for example) helped him to 'sharpen' his own vision of Latin America.

³⁹ Bataille, 'The modern spirit and the play of transpositions', [1930], originally printed in *DOCUMENTS*, 8, (published a year later in 1931) trans. by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson, in Ades and Baker, *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and DOCUMENTS*, 241-243. Bataille's essay is a response to an article in *L'intransigent* written by Surrealist Roger Vitrac that Bataille does not consider to have gone far enough in considering the decline of artistic practice. Bataille directly challenges the spinelessness and conventionalism of Surrealism.

⁴⁰ For a definition of Freudian sublimation, Breton offers the following: 'in spite of what we pretend, we see how little reality satisfies us; thus beneath the pressure of our interior repressions, we create within ourselves a whole fantasy life which, by carrying out our desires, makes up for the insufficiencies of our actual existence. The energetic person who succeeds ... is the one who manages to turn these desire-fantasies into reality. When this transmutation fails ... the person turns away from reality: he retires into the happier world of dreams.' Breton, 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism', in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, [1930] 2010, 160.

⁴¹ Lo extraordinario no es bello ni hermoso por fuerza. No es bello ni feo; es más que nada asombroso por lo insólito. Todo lo insólito, todo lo asombroso, todo lo que se sale de las mornas establecidas es maravilloso.' It is of significance that Carpentier completely misses the fact that Breton also believes the marvellous to be ugly, weird and frightening, as expressed in the citation from the first manifesto, above. In his interpretation, Carpentier only speaks of Breton's emphasis on beauty.

Carpentier signed 'Un cadáver' (1930), a petition against Breton (to which Breton responds in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*), a decision that must have been helped by the fact that Breton repeatedly repudiated the value of music (Carpentier 1985, 354-355). This is further explored in an article in *Carteles*, of the same year, entitled 'El Escandalo De Maldoror' ['The Scandal of Maldoror'], which refers to the Paris nightclub 'Maldoror', opened by erstwhile Surrealist Roger Vitrac (1899-1952) and named after Lautréamont's *Chants des Maldoror*, and its relation to the Surrealists' reclaiming of the poet as a proto Surrealist. The article recounts how Breton (comically likened to Mussolini and Robespierre) objected to this nightclub on the grounds that it defamed the memory of the poet. Carpentier is amused by Breton's hypocritical objection to the club, and points to this incident as an example of why Breton's circle was ultimately destined to splinter.

In contrast, Carpentier's correspondence with Bataille evidences the admiration that the then young Cuban held for this authoritative older man:

I still recall our conversations about 1929 or 30 on the subject of magical brotherhoods in Cuba, our meetings with Robert [Desnos] at the Deux Magots, the books that you advised me to read [...] And also the Documents' editorial staff, a magazine *where everthing that took place afterwards had already been said* – in your writings, in those of Leiris – in an almost prophetic fashion (Ubilluz 2006, 317-313, original emphasis).

He clearly saw the ideas unfolding through *DOCUMENTS* - the reflections on indigenous cultures, the objectification of social violence, the presence of rare and sometimes horrific natural phenomena, the fruits of anthropological research - as being ahead of their time. In 1931 Carpentier edited a single issue magazine, *Íman* aimed at conveying the thoughts and sensibilities of Latin Americans to Europeans, and to communicate the very depths of European literary and artistic values to Latin America. (Birkenmeier and Echevarría 2004, 61) Bataille contributed an untitled essay detailing the revolutionary purpose of *DOCUMENTS*, and stating his belief that revolution in Latin American could renew and vitalise European culture (Ubilluz 2006, 22). Although I disagree with Juan Carlos Ubilluz that Bataille was responsible for Carpentier's 'ethnographic gaze' (Carpentier was already developing these ideas in childhood, and his

articles on Afro-Cuban music in *revista de avance* and *Social* pre-date his relocation to Paris), his ideas undoubtedly encouraged Carpentier to search for new perspectives.

But Bataille was a rare ally in Carpentier's quest to re-frame and re-present indigenous Latin American narratives. In the same year as editing *Íman*, Carpentier also wrote an article about a French documentary 'México, Según Una Película Europea' ['Mexico, according to a European film']. The film *Indios, hermanos míos*, [Indians, my brothers], which he had eagerly anticipated, was directed by the writer and journalist Tytaina⁴², and depicts Mexico's indigenous Mayan and Axttec civilisations. Carpentier describes how the film's director seems almost boastful of having discovered a small population in the Isle of Tiburón, and how he audaciously begins the film with the announcement that he has found the 'secrets' of civilisations. Carpentier notes sourly how the director also fails to show the incredible volcanoes, flora and fauna of the region (1976b, 492). With obvious displeasure he writes: 'After seeing films like this, I think it painful to have to await the arrival of outsiders, and for them to give an account of their powerful and negative visions of our landscapes and our things' (1976b, 493).⁴³ This gives an early insight into his frustration at French portrayals of Latin America, a view that he often reiterates, asking that artists should stop presenting it as 'other': 'I've taken my stand precisely against the exotic [...] What I want is that the elements of Latin America be integrated into a universal culture' (Brennen 2001, 42). I certainly feel that the cinema went some way to providing this universal arena that Carpentier desired.

Towards the end of his stay in Paris Carpentier experienced an epiphany when, prompted by Desnos, he realised that the Caribbean world of his childhood was the real repository of the marvellous that Surrealist practice was attempting to replicate. He could no longer remain in Paris, feeling the pull of Latin America: 'Breton asked me for some texts for *La Révolution Surréaliste*, which I started, but in truth never completed. Something strange happened to me [...] There was a

⁴² For whom I can find no reference or detail.

⁴³ 'Después de ver films así, pienso que es doloroso tener que esperar la llegada de forasteros para darnos cuenta del poder negativo de sus visiones de nuestras cosas y nuestros paisajes.', 1976b, 493

doubling (repliege) in me. And suddenly, like an obsession, the ideas of America entered me' (López Lemus 1985, 362-363).

This also extends to Carpentier's sentiments regarding language and communication; it is of paramount importance to him that culture is experienced through the rhythms of musical and linguistic cadence. Cuba, for example, produced music deeply influenced by the intrinsic cultural syncretism resulting from centuries of colonial oppression, slavery and inter-racial blending: 'Two musical cultures - one inherited from the Christian West and the Moorish tradition; the other, elementary, constructed on the basis of rhythms and percussive qualities considered as inherently worthy values - would find themselves meeting in that maritime crossroads that was Cuba' ([1946], 2001, 93). This interest in cultural hybridity, what Carpentier refers to in musical terms as a 'polychromatic iridescence' (2001, 96), lies at the heart of his writing. Finally in 1939, he returned to Latin America, and before settling back in Havana, travelled to Venezuela, Mexico, the Antilles, and Haiti to connect with the landscapes, politics and customs of Latin America.

In summary, Carpentier's earlier reviews written between 1925 and 1928 are similar in tone to European film criticism of the period, celebrating the cinema as an artistic muse, a creative inspiration. The first theorisation of his *real maravilloso*, they illustrate a thoroughly modernist approach to realism. Bridging the gap between *magischer realismus* and the later *maravilloso*, they reassert the importance of Surrealist practise within the later Latin American literary mode. Although Carpentier becomes increasingly critical of European culture, his experience in Paris proves fundamental to his later career. Ultimately, his expertise was in music and literature, and these pursuits took precedence over his part-time film criticism. Through them he was able to integrate himself further into the Surrealist group in the role of practitioner, as well as critic.

The following section investigates Carpentier's response to Breton's marvellous in his essay *lo real maravilloso americano*⁴⁴, and discusses whether his attempt to

⁴⁴ Although Carpentier uses *americano* to stand for Haiti, Cuba, the Antilles, Venezuela, Mexico, and so on, 'our America wrongly named Latin' (Carpentier, he predominantly describes the marvellous as being a latent and omnipresent fact throughout *latinoamericano* [Latin American],

establish a Latin American mode constitutes a complete departure from Surrealism.

v. Between European modernism and Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso americano*

The real thing always overflows the concept that is supposed to hold it. An object is more and other than what is implied in the idea of it. The idea remains a bare pattern, a sort of scaffold with which we try to get at reality (Ortega y Gasset, [1925] 1948, 37).

In April 1948, what was to become the prologue to Carpentier's globally successful novel *El reino de este mundo*, an essay on *lo real maravilloso americano*, was published in *El Nacional*, the Caracas newspaper, for the first time.⁴⁵ Unlike Franz Roh's manifesto mapping the new approach to reality in the plastic arts, Carpentier's prologue is part chronicle, part anthropological essay, yet serving as the introduction to *El reino de este mundo* it informs the novel, constructing a theoretical framework around it that has subsequently remained one of the most influential critical modes in Latin American literary history. As we have already discussed, Carpentier's *real maravilloso* has less to do with Roh's *magischer realismus* than with the Surrealist *merveilleux*, but ultimately differs from both in its geographical specificity, politics, socio-historical focus and purpose. Carpentier's marvellous realism celebrates the overwhelming natural phenomena, the traditions and the rich oral histories of a continent still working through its colonial past. His prologue became the foremost text in the dissemination of magic realism, and magic realist literature, throughout Latin America.⁴⁶

The prologue recounts a trip to Port-au-Prince in Haiti that Carpentier took with the French actor Louis Jouvet towards the end of 1943. What he witnessed there left an indelible imprint on all his subsequent writing:

(see Carpentier, 1998, 182) and for the purpose of this research I will refer to Carpentier's mode as Latin American

⁴⁵ It was published in Mexico the next year, and subsequently translated in 1954 (French), 1957 (English) and 1962 (Russian)

⁴⁶ Carpentier was not the first to link magic realism to Latin American literature, 'The first to do this was the Venezuelan novelist Arturo Uslar Pietri, who, in 1948 wrote: 'What predominated in the short story and left an indelible mark there was the consideration of man as a mystery surrounded by realistic facts, a poetic prediction or a poetic denial of reality. What for lack of another name could be called a magical realism.' (quoted in Leal, 2007, 62)

I was lucky enough to visit Henri Christophe's kingdom – such poetic ruins, Sans-Souci and the bulk of the Citadel of La Ferrière [sic], imposingly intact in spite of lightning and earthquakes; and I saw the still-Norman Cape Town, the Cap Français of the former colony, where a house with great long balconies leads to the palace of hewn stone inhabited years ago by Pauline Bonaparte. My encounter with Pauline Bonaparte there, so far from Corsica, was a revelation to me. I saw the possibility of establishing certain synchronisms, American, recurrent, timeless, relating this to that, yesterday to today.⁴⁷

The theme of cultural syncretism – a term used by Carpentier for 'the simultaneous expression of distinct cultural systems in the same expressive forms or [...] the accommodation of multiple (and often conflicting) cultural meanings in a shared expressive context' (Zamora 2006, xv) – informs much of Carpentier's writing. For him, the layering of years of colonial struggle, slavery, immigration, emigration and a rise in global travel are part of what comprises the marvellous. The cultural hybridity expressed in the architecture, the religious objects, the language, costumes, traditions and arts of Latin America both in Haiti and much wider afield, immediately extraordinary. One must, he argues, *believe* in these phenomena and not invoke the marvellous through disbelief, ('the case of the Surrealists for so many years') or through literature that is 'oneiric "by arrangement"' (1995, 86). Here Carpentier's misapprehension of Surrealist practice becomes particularly dogged. Representations of reality crafted through automatism, collage, or Surrealist film montage, which all rely on the precarious dichotomy of *heimlich/unheimlich* in order to create tension, cannot be dismissed as something separate from authentic emotional experience. Regardless of the manner in which it came to light, each work of art springs from the artist's experience of reality.

In the case of Haiti, and the story told in *El reino de este mundo*, this reality means believing in the miraculous powers of voodoo and in the power of collective faith through which thousands desire freedom. Carpentier argues that mythologies are created from political factors that push people to address their physical

⁴⁷ These real historical characters appear in Carpentier's *Kingdom* which tells of the black slave revolt, and the terrible rein of Henri Christophe, a former slave chef, who appointed himself Haiti's first king in 1811. The section of the novel in which a young and naïve Pauline Bonaparte experiences life in the New World highlights the clash between European religion and Haitian superstition, a central theme that runs throughout Carpentier's works. All citations of this essay are taken from the English translation by Faris and Zamora, 1995.

conditions in extraordinary ways, a syncretism located in reality, rather than the whims of the imagination. The Surrealist movement is never far from his mind, and the stark contrast between the two continents causes him to be critical of their methods. But what he learned and practised in France is responsible for a renewed awareness that enables his critique. The physical spectacle of Haiti, travels to China, the Aral Sea, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia (all mentioned in the prologue) influence the way in which he is able to address Latin American history and begin 'to understand many things' about its thirty century legacy (1995, 83). It is a continent, he says, 'where we have not yet begun to establish an inventory of our cosmogonies' or begun to catalogue the marvellous that springs from its 'unexpected richness of reality' and 'amplification of scale' (1995, 86-87). For Carpentier personally, it is a matter of experiencing the shocks and horrors first hand, a process that transforms his perception completely, resulting in what he terms 'estado límite', an extreme state of heightened perception. His experience is a reversal of Breton's 'état d'attente' in which he experiences heightened perception *after* witnessing something marvellous, whereas Breton is prepared for stimulus *apriori* of the event. It is this difference that Carpentier uses to establish a dividing line between Surrealism and *lo real maravilloso*. However, the results are strikingly similar, and after his initial 'awakening' Carpentier merely re-enacts Breton's ramblings against a different backdrop, shifting his perspective on the strange ritualistic behaviour of the modern city to one focused on the rituals and superstitions of the Haitian plantations. His novel is highly self-reflexive, an 'inventory' of wonders, but the characters themselves are presented as having a certain naivety that he claims to be absent from Surrealism. The irony is that for all his claims for authenticity of experience, and proximity to a real, natural marvellous, Carpentier's perspective becomes increasingly Bretonian as he prepares his mind for further wonders. Breton and Carpentier each encourage a certain state of mind and receptiveness to their environment in order to find it marvellous. Carpentier also overlooks the possibility that Surrealist chance is not always 'conjured' or 'manufactured' (1995), but is part of the randomly juxtaposed fragments and irrational logic of everyday life.

vi. *Lo real maravilloso*: ontological magic

Franco Moretti makes a significant observation regarding Carpentier's prologue, insisting that the theoretical mode which emerges, in being labelled marvellous reality, as opposed to marvellous realism, creates 'not a poetics [but] a state of affairs' (1994, 234). However, in translation, Carpentier's prologue has become a mode, a theory, and to some extent a manifesto for Latin American writing; the boundary between reality and a theory of reality, therefore, remains blurred. This is also evident in the transition from the prologue to the novel itself, non-fiction directly followed by fiction, both of which aim to tell a political story and to represent a reality tinged with mythology and superstition. The shift from personal memoir with direct theoretical notation to a novel focalised through a free-indirect narrative, is diminished due to the history which defines both accounts. The believability of the narration contributes to its magic realism, and its anthropological specificity creates a literary marvellous to which Todorov alludes (he admits to not having space to examine it in detail) as being 'marvelous in its pure – unexplained – state' (1975, 57). In response to Moretti's assertion that the mode offers a socio-political 'state of affairs' rather than a 'poetics' I would argue that it articulates both in constant tension. Carpentier's literary worlds are based upon factual observations, yet his embellishments – the lengthy descriptive passages evoking works of art and musical notation, sudden dramatic climaxes filled with sensory description, condensed poetic images representing a resurfaced memory or a character's chain of thought – manipulate history via the human mind. Thus Carpentier creates a contrapuntal poetics in his novels that encounters a myriad of shades between the factual or historical, and the imaginary or subjective. The tension between the real and the marvellous is constant, but nuanced rather than polarised.

In interviews, Carpentier is dismissive of the term 'boom' attributed to the resurgence of Latin American literature in the 1960s and 1970s (which includes Carpentier, Fuentes, and García-Márquez): 'There is no such thing as the "boom", all "boom" is ephemeral, transient and unsound' ['No hay tal *boom*, todo *boom* es efímero, pasajero y carece de solidez'] (Chao 1998, 67). Instead he argues that it took decades for Latin American writers to come to terms with their complex modernity, and that the best among them address the issues of

their epoch through the colonial past. He is also concerned that Latin America should be presented as a continent of diversity rather than as separate nations, united by a shared history and defined in contrast to Europe and North America. His own engagement with political violence in his novels illustrates this idea, as does his belief that the marvellous emerges from horror and suffering as much as from beauty or strangeness. In 1973 he writes: 'It should not be forgotten that at the end of the First World War, in a time of misery, difficulties and dramas, in a time of general bankruptcy and disorder, an artistic trend emerged in Germany known as Expressionism'⁴⁸ (Chao 1998, 179). Carpentier's examples of Expressionism are not paintings but plays that tackle modern social issues: Bertolt Brecht's first play *Baal* (1923), Czech playwright Karel Čapek's introduction of the concept of the robot in his play *R.U.R* (1920)⁴⁹, and Weimar playwright Georg Kaiser's critiques of technology and German economics in *Side by Side* (1923)⁵⁰. He admires the sarcasm, the social message, and the revolutionary ideas in these dramas. Carpentier is not strictly correct in calling these pieces Expressionist, however, and what he notes in their social critique is similar to the Verist strand of Neue Sachlichkeit, including Grosz and Dix, which as we have discussed, retained traces of Expressionism. It is clear that for Carpentier, the 'leftist' social critique of these artists overshadowed Roh's mode of *magischer realismus*.

Yet in 1948 when he first articulates *lo real maravilloso*, Carpentier takes Roh and Cocteau's notion of 'something' that is brought into existence when reality is perceived differently, when unknown elements emerge, and uses the modernist concept of the marvellous to reconnect with Latin American myth: 'taking the various aspects of social transformation, *and rewriting them as something else*: as so many magical phenomena, or the return of ancient archetypes. The devastation remains [...] but they become, if nothing else, (mythically) comprehensible, and even familiar' (Moretti 1994, 248). This is Carpentier's legacy for Latin

⁴⁸ 'No hay que olvidar que al terminarse la Primera Guerra Mundial, en una época de miserias y de dificultades y de dramas, en una época de bancarrota general y de desorden, surge en Alemania una tendencia artística llamada expresionismo.'

⁴⁹ Čapek's play *R.U.R*. [Rossum's Universal Robots, 1920] is believed responsible for the wide dissemination of the word 'robot' in the 1920s, which in Czech [roboto], refers to a person who responds to orders without original thought.

⁵⁰ Kaiser's 1923 play *Side by Side* [*Nebeneinander*], featured set designs by George Grosz, and is considered an example of *Volksstück*, a play for the people.

American literature, but more specifically for Cuban revolutionary narrative: devastating history retold through ancient myth and utopian dreams ('a flight to a form of freedom'; Echevarría 1998, 8), but without nostalgia or an excess of the fantastic.

Carpentier's *real maravilloso* needs also to be understood as a chronicle, part of a long literary tradition re-worked in the early twentieth century: 'the magical, writ large from the earliest - in the letters of Columbus, in the chroniclers, in the sages of Cabeza de Vaca - entered the literary mainstream during Modernism' (Flores [1955], in Faris and Zamora 1995, 112). The gap between the physical reality encountered by European settlers, and a language ill-prepared to express its wonders is evident. Perhaps the most striking of these accounts is that of Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca (c1490), who spent eight years (1528-1536) walking across a large portion of North America and published an account of his exploration in 1542. This describes malnourishment, mutual fear between settlers and Indians, flora, fauna and local customs. In a letter to King Charles V of Spain, Cabeza wrote: 'Since my account of this is, in my opinion, prudent and not frivolous, for the sake of those who go to conquer those lands [...] I wrote with great certainty; although one may read some very novel things, very hard for some, they can believe them with a doubt, and accept them as very true' (1993, 28-9). What is striking in this account is the description of a *mutually* influential relationship between the colonisers and the indigenous peoples that evolves throughout the colonial period, inverting the hierarchical dichotomy of coloniser and colonised. Cabeza's account of his metamorphosis from Christian to Shaman healer is extraordinary and symptomatic of the cultural syncretism which Carpentier defines as *maravilloso*. As Spanish critic Silvia Spitta explains, the figure of the Shaman illustrates the indeterminate space allotted to an outsider:

The position of the shaman as both inside and outside the community was and is so important because shamans mediate between the world of the living and that of the dead, between matter and the spirits, the sacred and the profane, the natural and the supernatural (1995, 41).

Cabeza is a rare figure for this period of New World history and his detailed ethnographic accounts reveal the process of transculturation⁵¹ taking place. Such first-hand accounts of the New World made it seem magical because they were enmeshed with preconceptions and exotic fantasies already held in the imaginations of many Europeans. Carpentier's re-telling of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) from the perspective of an African slave in *El reino de este mundo* is also a chronicle, but of a greater transculturation due to the advanced stage of settlement and the increase in inter-racial marriage that it brought. For Carpentier, the sheer scale of the cultural variety and the geographical features, and the turbulent colonial history make his home continent seem extraordinary in comparison to Europe: 'In Latin America, epic events (terrible and wonderful) are commonplace. The past exercises enormous influence over the present' (1985, 103). This, naturally, does not consider the wide range of indigenous cultures, or the fantastic elements of wars, dictatorships, natural disasters and industrialisation in Europe. Moreover, the historical figures of the Haitian slave uprisings far surpass any of the monarchs or heads of state, or their literary counterparts in Carpentier's eyes.

vii. The Kingdom of This World: 'Lycanthropic'⁵² realism as revolution

The Devil: Permission to enter I seek ...

Providence: Who are you?

The Devil: The King of the West

Providence: I know you, accursed one. Come in. (He enters)

The Devil: Oh, blessed court, Eternal Providence! Where are you sending Columbus to renew my evil deeds? Know you not that long since I rule there?

Lope de Vega, Epigraph to *El reino de este mundo*

⁵¹ Cuban essayist and music critic, Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969), unsatisfied with the term 'acculturation' – a gradual loss of one's culture – began to use instead the term 'transculturation' to define a mutual interaction and exchange across different cultures. With this term he wished to offset the tendency of anthropologists and historians to stress the impact of the coloniser on native peoples without considering the inverse situation. Spitta gives a detailed analysis of these two terms in *Between Two Waters*, 1995, 1-70

⁵² Lycanthropic is the term that Carpentier uses to describe Mackandal's (the black slave leader) transformation from human to insect. The term originally refers to the transformation of human form into that of a wolf, but is often used to denote transformation into any animal form.

In 1930, Louis Aragon wrote 'La peinture au défi', an essay discussing the cultural-historical role of the marvellous as a compensation for that which is lacking in reality: 'the marvellous is always the materialization of a moral symbol in violent opposition to the morals of the world in which it surges forth' (Aragon [1930] 2004, 225). But rather than positing an inverted, idealised or fantasised version of reality, Aragon considers a 'new' marvellous as ordinary as sitting in a café drinking coffee: '*My Kingdom is not of this world*. On the contrary, the kingdom of visions is of this world, today it is this world' (2004, 225).

Carpentier's illustration of Aragon's idea in his novel testifies to the influence that Surrealism continued to have on his work, an influence he concedes in all his writing and interviews. His intention to write a novel about a marvellous reality, an earthly, ordinary reality is underscored in his title, in '*este mundo*' and not a distant fantasy: 'I titled it in opposition to the "kings" (gods) of the skies that the theologians tell us about'⁵³

Carpentier's novel begins with a citation from Spanish playwright Lope de Vega's (1562-1635) play *El Nuevo Mundo* [The New World, 1614], based on the struggle for power between Catholicism and indigenous religions in Latin America [appendix iii-2]. The lines cited in Carpentier's epigraph, cut from their original context and placed in this new one, pause the action of the play at a moment of ambiguity – the devil is reproduced in the Western crown and its *conquistadors*, but is also suggested to have ruled among the Indians for centuries. De Vega's play presents the conquest from the point of view of Columbus and his men, yet, as this passage illustrates, introduces ambiguity via its assignment of good and evil to the characters. This point of contradiction provides a significant focus for an examination of Carpentier's account of the successes and failures of the Haitian Revolution, and links to a second level of ambiguity in the novel in which socio-historical narrative and *lo real maravilloso* converge. The contradiction and convergence result in a depiction of Haiti that is simultaneously imagined and real, a political drama shaped through the imaginations of a racially diverse population. Despite the strong religious context of the story, its miraculous events and superstitious fears, Carpentier asserts a new reality designed to be believable.

⁵³'lo titulé así en oposición al reino de los cielos de que nos hablan los téologos' (Carpentier, 1998, 103)

The novel covers substantial historical ground in its 180 pages, and temporal ellipses are to be expected. Carpentier offers the reader an ancient Haitian past that is, as some critics have pointed out, a fragmented history, (Paravisini-Gebert, 2004) at times inaccurate, even deliberately so (Speratti-Piñero, 1980; Shaw, 1985; Wakefield, 2004). It is set in four sections that span from 1758 to 1805 during the French colonial period, and take place in areas where African slavery was prevalent: the Cap Français, Saint-Domingue, the Plaine du Nord. Part One introduces the African slave Ti Noël, his white master Monsieur Lenormand de Mézy, a French plantation owner, and François Mackandal (Macandal in the novel), an African *houngan* (a male Voodoo priest) who led the first slave uprising in Haiti, in 1758. Part Two details the arrival of Pauline Bonaparte and her husband General Leclerc (in 1802), sent by the French government to restore order in Saint-Domingue after the slave uprising. After her husband dies of yellow fever in the same year, Pauline flees Haiti in fear of her life, setting sail for France via Rome and taking with her Soliman, an African slave. Part Three finds Ti Noël a free man decades later in the Plaine-du-Nord where former slave Henri Christophe declares himself the first king of Haiti. There is a considerable jump in time from Part Two to Three, which Donald Shaw explains: ‘Historically in between, there occurred the years of the struggle of Toussaint L'Ouverture against Leclerc, the regime of Dessalines, and the early years of Christophe. But these are not to Carpentier's purpose’ (1985, 30).⁵⁴ For Shaw, Carpentier's purpose is clear, to contrast the slave uprising with the eventual dictatorship of former slave Henri Christophe. Certainly Carpentier foregrounds the cyclical, repetitive return of history and its shaping of human identity, yet the novel is also a vivid account of a hybridised identity that evades the boundaries of hierarchy.

Lastly, Part Four commences with Pauline Bonaparte and her slave Soliman in Rome, on their way back to France, and ends with Ti Noël ruminating on the ruins of Henri Christophe's castle *Sans-Souci* and his former master's house on the plantation (to which he has returned). The endless historical return - old dictatorships falling into new hands, continuing enslavement and lack of freedom - is ultimately offset by Carpentier's utopian vision of a freedom of the

⁵⁴ Seymour Menton has referred to these historical omissions as a ‘distortion’, and to Carpentier's fictional style as composite, a ‘new historical novel’ that was to pave the way for later Latin American writers. See 1993, 20-21

mind. The novel, as he explains in the prologue, is about ‘collective faith’ (1995, 87), and it is also about revolution. Carpentier’s public criticism of General Machado resulted in his imprisonment in Cuba, and he remained faithful to the spirit of revolution throughout his life⁵⁵. In the prologue to *El reino de este mundo* he explains that he decided to write about Haiti because the slave uprisings had been the first great example of organised revolutionary action in Latin America (1995, 176). For Timothy Brennan, this is what constitutes the author’s international appeal: he reaches readers ‘with portraits of a *political* (rather than merely racial) other’ (Brennan 2001, 7).

El reino de este mundo is narrated using free indirect discourse, which combines characters’ speech and thought with narrative commentary, a strategy that provides multiple and shifting perspectives on the events that unfold. Thus the uncertainty and transmutability of social identity is underscored, with *mestizaje*⁵⁶ (racial mixing, as Carpentier puts it, (1995, 88)), becoming a political metaphor for the potential to resist hierarchical categorisation. In each of the four parts, the African slave Ti Noël acts as an intermediary between the African world and the French colonisers. Free indirect narration allows Carpentier to emphasise the interpenetration of the subjective and objective, using ‘Ti Noël to bridge the gap between the objective truth of history and the subjective beliefs of the slaves, who fought for their freedom’ (Souza 1976, 36).

The first section of the novel describes colonial life in the plantations, where the hopes of the black slaves are stirred by the voodoo priest Macandal: ‘his narrative art, when with terrible gestures, he played the part of the different personages, held the men spellbound’ (2006 13). They trust his plan to end the suffering on the plantations, even though nobody is sure what form it will take, and believe him to possess the magical power of metamorphosis. When he disappears for four years, they are convinced that he is still with them in animal form: ‘as he had the power to take the shape of hoofed animal, bird, fish, or insect, Macandal continually visited the plantations of the Plaine to watch over his faithful’ (35).

⁵⁵ See Carpentier’s correspondence with Fidel Castro, reprinted in the Ministerio de Cultura’s dedicated booklet *Alejo Carpentier, 75 aniversario*.

⁵⁶ Carpentier’s usage of *mestizaje* fits into the theory of a national ideology; a theory which hoped the mixed races living in Latin America could assimilate and benefit from diversity. The concept of *mestizaje* expresses the tensions, contradictions, and ambiguities of its birth in the New World.

These beliefs are mediated by Ti Noël, whose attendance at the meetings affords him an insider's knowledge of voodoo, which gives authenticity and realism to the incredible scenes. He is astonished by a witch who plunges her arms into boiling oil without burning, and curious about the talk 'of extraordinary animals that had had human offspring. And of men whom certain spells turned into animals' (19).

Carpentier retells the history of François Mackandal's stealthy poisoning of plantation owners' families and livestock objectively, describing the horror and bewilderment that results: 'For terror was gaunting the faces and choking the throats [...] the colonists whipped and tortured their slaves, trying to find an explanation' (28-9). The reaction of the crucifix-clutching colonists is no more or less real than the magical power that Mackandal is believed to wield. Using historical fact to illustrate the strength of the slaves' belief in voodoo, Part One ends with Macandal's execution, which at the time he was believed to have escaped by transforming himself into a mosquito. Emphasising the strength held in this belief even further, Carpentier writes: 'Macandal had kept his word, remaining in the Kingdom of This World' (46) – for the slaves his reincarnation was real. What is significant in Carpentier's rendering of this historic event is how it describes the different perceptions of reality in the plantation. From Macandal's point of view, for example, European rituals seem ridiculous, and this gives Ti Noël confidence to assume mental superiority over the colonisers: 'he had little esteem for the King of England, or the King of France, or of Spain, who ruled the other half of the island, and whose wives, according to Macandal, tinted their cheeks with oxblood and buried foetuses' (13). But despite Ti Noël's initial doubts, he passes on tales of Mackandal to his children, and awaits the priest's return.

After a gap of 20 years, Part Two opens to flourishing plantations, abundant with imports from France and Spain, new shops and theatres and a growing number of visitors from Europe. In this section, Macandal's role is taken by Jamaican slave, Bouckman, who leads the slave revolution (which broke out in 1791, and eventually defeated the French in 1803) and forces Ti Noël's master de Mézy to flee across the sea to Santiago de Cuba. Carpentier emphasises the gap between the colonial dream and the reality of oppression by channelling de Mézy's

thoughts. He fulminates on the 'utopian imbeciles in Paris' dreaming of 'the equality of all men' from their café tables (65), who have no idea of an unstable world in which 'a drum might be more than just a goatskin stretched across a hollow log' (72). This attack on French bourgeois intellectuals, in which lofty aims and philosophies fall short of the reality, is typical of Carpentier's novels. It suggests that because Latin Americans invest so strongly in their cultural objects they can only be truly understood within their original context. Yet, Haiti's religious artefacts and art works had already undergone a process of transculturation and were not all autochthonous, thus any question of 'original' authenticity is necessarily hybrid, comprised of manifold spiritual traditions. Moreover the abundance of European paintings and art historical influence described in the novel is illustrative of a changing consciousness in the New World brought by colonisation. Into this hybrid reality arrives the young and gullible Pauline Bonaparte, whose ideas of the New World have been collected from books, and for whom the 'abundance that surrounded her, unlike anything she had known in her childhood' (88) was an enchanting dream:

The sight of the Cap and the Plaine du Nord, with the background of mountains blurred by the mist rising from the canefields delighted Pauline, who had read Paul and Virginia,⁵⁷ and had heard "L'Insulaire, a charming Creole contredanse of exotic rhythm published in Paris on the rue du Saumon (87).

Again Carpentier underscores the mythologised perception of the New World held in Europe, but also the increasing cultural interpenetration and hybridisation formed in the clash of realities. As Pauline becomes accustomed to her life in the tropics, she exchanges her servants for the African slave Soliman, and through his influence rejects saints and 'common sense' in favour of the 'ominous' rituals of 'the living cosmogony of the Negro' (93). Carpentier describes a scene of Surrealist proportions, in which disparate elements are thrust together: Europeans wearing 'the last powdered wigs of the century' (75) dance while Negro priests perform rituals with 'a decapitated rooster [...] still fluttering amid scattered grains of corn' (94). This reality, Carpentier seems to

⁵⁷ This is the title of Jacques Henri Bernadin de Saint-Pierre's novel of 1782, in which two childhood lovers in Mauritius flee together on a boat, are shipwrecked and die. The novel was intended to illustrate the 'false sentimentality' that was corrupting young 'women of nature' and was popular among the upper classes.

be saying, is richer and more mysterious than any fantasy. He undermines the racial stereotypes, narrating the action from multiple points of view, and self-consciously allowing the most obvious signifiers of ethnicity and race to be transformed and syncretised.

This hybridity is not solely portrayed as a Haitian phenomenon, but is also evidenced in the episode in which Ti Noël accompanies his master to Santiago de Cuba to escape the Revolution. In this episode Ti Noël is brought to pray with his master at the Santiago Cathedral. He notes how the vivid iconography, the colours, the human hair on the figures, the Black Virgins and the mystery of the confessionals 'had an attraction, a power of seduction in presence, symbols, attributes, and signs similar to those of the altars of the *houmforts* consecrated to Damballah, the Snake god⁵⁸' (80). The statue of St. James ('the Moorslayer'⁵⁹) reminds him of the African warrior god Ogoun Fai who had guided Bouckman and his followers in their Revolution. In this clever juxtaposition, Carpentier reverses the racialised murder of the Moors. Steve Wakefield argues that in this reappropriation of cultural objects: 'Carpentier takes hold of the weapon of a dominant power and puts it to a new, subversive use' (2004, 1). Yet in choosing Ti Noël as the principal protagonist of his story, a man who is not strongly motivated, but rather attached to these fetishized objects indiscriminately for their emotional value, Carpentier is also undermining the notion that any culture can prevail. To Ti Noël all systems of rule are equally ambiguous and mysterious, but each has 'a power of seduction in presence'. Thus ultimately Carpentier emphasises the unstable, seductive power of the object world. Commentary which critiques the idiocy or brutality of Europeans is but one strand in a polymorphous chain of action. It brings to mind Michael Richardson's definition of Surrealism in which he suggests that 'Their interest is almost exclusively in exploring the conjunctions, the points of contact between different realms of experience' (Richardson 2006, 3). Once again we can see the

⁵⁸ The principle religion of the African slaves is called Vodun, or Voodoo, and the main god (or bringer of fertility) is *Damballah-Weda* and is characterised by a snake. The snake *Legba*, is also greatly symbolic in this religion as an omniscient and omnipresent mediator between the human and the spirit world. (Barrett, 1974, p. 23) The snake is a prominent symbol of protection and health in Latin American mythology, but in the western mind it has often been, mistakenly, associated exclusively with Voodoo.

⁵⁹ St James, one of the 12 apostles, is said to have appeared to Spanish Christian troops and fought with them against the Moors and Islam, at the Battle of Clavijo in 844. Jose Gambino's sculpture of St. James in the cathedral at Santiago de Compostela depicts the saint in a violent pose.

relevance of a Surrealist aesthetic to that of magic realism; Carpentier may have started with the marvels of the flora and fauna, but the real Latin American marvellous is actually a collage of subverted images.

The seduction of power is explored in Part Three when the novel jumps to Saint Domingue in 1811, and the tragi-comic reign of Henri-Christophe, a former slave chef, now strutting through his palace wearing the imperial 'Napoleonic bicorne'. Henri Christophe's empire, 'the marvelous world', shocks Ti Noël, who has recently returned to Haiti from Cuba a free man. To witness a 'world of negroes' in which 'every protest had been silenced in blood' is inconceivable to him, as is the palace Citadel La Ferrière which rises up into the clouds while slaves labour in its 'bowels' (116). With his newfound Catholic faith, Henri Christophe has betrayed his fellow Africans and almost completely rejected voodoo, claiming the European past of his oppressors as his own. Appropriating the devices of theatrical production – claps of thunder, ghostly apparitions and crowds of extras – Carpentier describes the marvellous metamorphosis of slave king to surrealist⁶⁰ automaton to petrified object of history. Towards the end of his reign, the king is deserted by his staff, and wanders through the great halls of mirrors in his palace like a 'big mechanical toy', seeking 'the solidarity of the marble' of his balustrades.

As the thunder increases, the citadel at Sans Souci is set ablaze and looted by the people, and amidst the flames Henri Christophe takes his own life. 'The huge edifice stood empty, taking on, with the vast silence of its rooms, the funereal solemnity of a royal tomb' (149). His corpse is left to sink into a pit of wet mortar save for his little finger, which is given to his wife to preserve in a vial of brandy. Henri Christophe is entombed in his own deranged dream, and whereas Macandal returns in insect form, Christophe's body becomes part of a historical monument to the failure of empire. These two figures represent the dual nature of historical time: the first the eternal return of tendencies bound to repeat, 'this endless return of chains ... this proliferation of suffering' (171-2); and the

⁶⁰ Carpentier commented that Henri Christophe's empire was completely delirious and surrealist: 'el imperio del rey Christophe, que fue un imperio delirante, un imperio, diría yo, completamente surrealista'. See *Conferencias* 1987, 95

second the 'ruin' of Breton's *merveilleux*, the artefact signifying the socio-historical past.

In Part Four Carpentier uses the words of Spanish playwright Pedro Caldéron de la Barca to encapsulate the theme of cyclical and syncretic history:

I had fear of these visions

But since seeing these others

My fear is grown greater

Caldéron's play *La vida es sueño* (Life is a dream, first performed in 1635), tells the story of a Spanish prince imprisoned from birth to avert a disastrous fate that has been prophesised. Years later as a grown man he is released but kills a man and is sent back to prison. Told by the guards that the previous visit to the Royal court was a dream, the prince is unable to distinguish what is real. Carpentier uses this ancient conceit, of life as a continually repeating dream, to frame the final part of his novel in which the black slave Soliman spends the summer in Rome as part of the French entourage. Carpentier plays with perspective, the Italian beggars perceive Soliman as an ambassador from overseas, and other townsfolk stop to listen to his stories about Haiti: 'his gaping audience had no clear idea of where all these things had taken place' (155). Soliman enjoys his minor celebrity in Rome, at night visiting his lover at the Borghese Palace where she works.

On one such evening, a marvellous event occurs that affects Soliman greatly. Venturing out from the servants' kitchen, drunk, he strays into a room in which a single marble statue of a naked woman stands against the wall. Vaguely recognising the face, he begins to touch it, recalling the contact of a body that differed from this marble one only in substance. Slowly massaging the statue, the chill of the stone suddenly jolts him into remembering: 'This statue, yellow in the light of the lantern, was the corpse of Pauline Bonaparte, a corpse newly stiffened, recently stripped of breath and sight which perhaps there was still time to bring back to life. With a terrible cry, as though his breast were riven, the Negro began to shout.' As he continues to shout, the palace guards arrive dressed in bicorne hats that immediately remind Soliman of the night of Henri

Christophe's death, and he falls into a trance, summoning Papa Legba, the voodoo intermediary between the humanity and the spirit world. This passage demonstrates Carpentier's skill at blending fiction with historical fact to create the uncanny. The novel does not describe Pauline's actual death, or her marriage to Camillo Borghese, but it does mention Antonio Canova's statue *Venus Victrix* which was based on Pauline and commissioned by her husband in 1805. The statue, still in the Borghese Museum in Rome, is of white, waxed marble, and Pauline is rendered in the classical style as a nude goddess. According to the museum⁶¹, the statue was originally set on a base which rotated and was originally viewed by candlelight, which would account for the surreal animation that Soliman perceives.

The marvellous events in *El reino de este mundo* are part of a history that Carpentier insists is extraordinary without design. We know from his earlier work that he was firm on his stand to represent Afro-Cuban culture and to support revolution throughout the Hispanic world. However, many critics find a paradox in his detailing of social reality when it is coupled with the magic of African or Indian religions. Most prominent in this assertion is Roberto González Echevarría who has written extensively on Carpentier, and argues that Carpentier's magical realism is fraught with contradiction, that it argues for a marvellous that can only be felt through strong beliefs, and that it stays 'on the side of the "other"': 'All magic, all marvel, supposes an alteration of order, an alterity - assumes the other, the world, looking back at us from the other side' (1977, 127). I would argue that Carpentier's lengthy separation from the continent of his birth inevitably led him to view it very differently. But without nostalgia or an exclusive protracted sympathy for either the European or the Latin American way of life, he offers a thesis on what reality can be, and become – through art and through socio-political change.

El reino de este mundo addresses the central modernist concern of how to record reality and how to break with the past while not separating from it completely. As Sally Harvey observes, Carpentier needed to portray a reality of Latin America and transpose it, globalise it (1994, 51). The novel ends with a 'great green wind

⁶¹ <http://www.galleriaborghese.it/borghese/en/epaolinab.htm>, accessed 21/06/2012

blowing from the ocean' that sweeps Ti Noël and his looted artefacts from the ancient régime⁶² along with the ruins of the plantations into the void, never to be seen again. There is no conclusion, the cycle has once again completed, but we do not know where or in what form it will begin again. Ti Noël realises that he feels 'countless centuries old. A cosmic weariness, as of a planet weighted with stones, fell upon his shoulders shrunk by so many blows, sweats, revolts [...] and despite the abject poverty to which he had sunk, he was leaving the same inheritance he had received' (178). His only consolation is the belief that he can replicate the metamorphosis that Mackandal perfected. Ultimately, as Pierre Mabilille argues, 'Man does not perceive the totality of what his eye sees in the reality that surrounds him but only what his mind is looking for.'⁶³

viii. 'Primitivism', 'Ethnographic Surrealism' and the marvellous

Questions have arisen as to whether *lo real maravilloso*, or *le merveilleux*, can stand as theoretical modes given their 'exoticist' perspective. In Carpentier's case eleven years residence in Paris, and his writing about Haiti and Venezuela, where he had never lived, sparked criticism. Wakefield believes that his *lo real maravilloso* deserves the benefit of the doubt because it aimed to find an indigenous identity for Latin America 'without isolating it in regionalism' and 'without the paternalistic overtone of "exoticism"'. But it could only be partially successful in this enterprise because any characterisation of a phenomenon as "marvellous" betrays the perspective of the viewer as that of an outsider' (2004, 72). Certainly this is a contentious issue, and one Carpentier himself was very aware of, but it did not prevent him from railing against certain Surrealists who sought inspiration from outside Europe. Carpentier's criticism does not hold up at all, as in many ways the shift in perception he sought for a Latin American marvellous was precisely what Surrealists such as Breton, André Masson (1896-1987), and Mabilille hoped to produce in art attuned to the principles of the *merveilleux*. Mabilille's experience in particular, was close to Carpentier's. Stationed in Porte-

⁶² Steve Wakefield asserts that Ti Noël's collection of artefacts from Sans-Souci represents a collection of pieces of petrified culture. (2004, 70) They represent the trappings of a regime, of a stagnant past that the marvellous can blow away in an explosive gust of wind. The three volumes of the *Grande Encyclopédie* on which he sits to eat sugar cane is a Carpentierian parody of Haitian hybridity: the African appropriation of European language and culture juxtaposed with the cultural horror that the sugar plantations suggest, bodily connected to Ti Noël (ingestion of the sugar and his being seated on the encyclopaedia).

⁶³ Pierre Mabilille "The Jungle" *Tropiques* no. 12 Jan 1945, cited in Richardson, 1994, 200

au-Prince between 1940 and 1946 in the role of chief surgeon and French cultural attaché, Mabile was intent on integrating himself into the local community (he famously attended Haitian voodoo ceremonies). In *Mirror of the Marvellous* he argues that discoveries made through unexpected encounters with objective reality serve to bring the subject closer to that reality: 'What is strange and bizarre manages to disorient us in such a way that the ordinary boundaries separating us from the world are destroyed. Observations of natural curiosities and freakish scenes, because of their violence, their feverish pitch, thus acquire immense importance' (Mabile 1998, 45). Mabile writes of a feeling akin to intoxication that occurs when one encounters the marvelous - a sensation which recalls Nadjia and Breton's electric interactions with the city in *Nadja*, or Aragon's revelations in *Paris Peasant*. Mabile's commentary on Haitian culture takes these accounts further because his distance from the exterior reality he experiences is now greater. The état d'attente and the desire for revelation remain unchanged. He explains how: 'We are within ourselves and also like strangers observing ourselves from the outside. There is not just one side of the mirror. Both sides exist at the same time' (1998, 46). A point of cultural or social crisis (war, revolution, slavery, competing religions, or poverty) defamiliarises any given environment and forces individuals to reconsider their existence, from multiple perspectives. This multiperspectival shift was exacerbated when Surrealists left Europe to search for meaning elsewhere.

Ethnographic surrealism is clearly defined in James Clifford's ground-breaking essay 'On Ethnographic Surrealism' (1981). Taking ethnography and Surrealism as two unstable and emerging practices, he applies the Surrealist *merveilleux* to unfamiliar cultures: 'To see culture and its norms - beauty, truth, reality - as artificial arrangements susceptible to detached analysis and comparison with other possible dispositions is crucial to an ethnographic attitude' (1981, 548). Clifford argues that surrealist procedures are always present in ethnography - juxtaposition that highlights sameness and difference, collated objects torn from their context, emphasis on shocking discoveries and unknown mysteries - and that ethnographic practice is a way of viewing culture and reality that undermines social order. For the Surrealists, Clifford argues, certain parts of Paris were as 'exotic' as 'primitive' cultures, and therefore ethnographic

surrealism should not be viewed as a form of racism, but as a ‘characteristic attitude of participant observation among the artifacts of a defamiliarized cultural reality’ (542).

ix. Martinique, Haiti and *Tropiques*

You could line up every cathedral, blow a few of them up, reflect it all in a lake and make the onlookers take belladonna, and you still wouldn’t come close to the entanglement of those trees. (André Breton and André Masson⁶⁴)

The problematic terms of ‘primitive’ or ‘primitivism’, the first a term for indigenous peoples with negative connotations, and the second a term for art that incorporates indigenous art, or indigenous ideas, are used by Tythacott to reflect a Western perspective on African, Oceanic, Latin American art (2003), and this research adopts the same application. It is Tythacott’s belief that the Surrealists had good intentions regarding their ‘reappropriation’ of the primitive. In what she sees as an ‘inversion’ of racism, whereby the primitive is exalted, she argues that ‘primitive’ artefacts were used transgressively: ‘Instead of aestheticizing the primitive, they surrealized it’ (60). The same inversion was famously employed in the anonymously-drawn Surrealist Map of the World, which in its cropping, enlargement and obliteration of countries, distorts the order of imperialist history. But, as Dennis Hollier stresses, ‘in surrealist geography, the world remains caught in the East/West opposition’ (2007, 6).

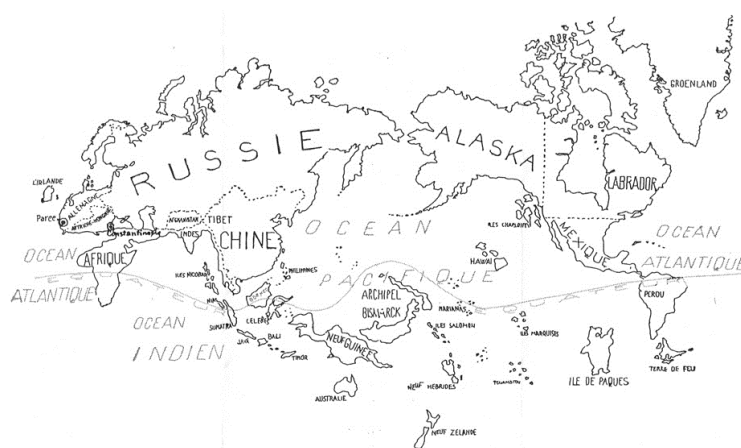


Figure 30: Le Monde au temps des surréalistes (The world at the time of the Surrealists)
1929, Variétés: Belgium

⁶⁴ André Breton and André Masson ‘Creole Dialogue’ in Michael Richardson (ed.) *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, 1996, 189

Carpentier was unimpressed with the map, noting that the Spanish peninsula was entirely omitted, while at the same time Spaniards Dalí and Buñuel were being keenly embraced by the French Surrealists (1998, 223). Two years later, Carpentier's reaction to the geopolitical representation of imperialism displayed in the *Exposition Coloniale* in Paris is evidenced in two articles published in *Carteles*. The first article, written in September 1931, describes in detail the marvellous rooms full of exhibits from across the globe, the 'beautiful journey' and 'synthesis of the spirit of the age' that the exposition affords its visitor (1976b, 499). However, while admiring the exhibits and the extravagance of the exhibition itself, he argues that the French had meddled in the lives of those who had never before cared about commodity culture, bringing them a "felicidad" problemática' (a problematic 'happiness') in the form of canned goods, railways, and vulgar hymns. The second article, written in October 1931, discusses the *Exposition Coloniale* on a night when the director of the Trocadéro Museum had put on an open-air concert of African *tam-tam* dancing. Carpentier notes the striking juxtaposition of well-dressed dignitaries and famous guests bewitched by the rhythms and violent intensity of the music (1976b, 500-502). His response to the exposition reveals his discomfort with the reification of 'primitive' art, yet at the same time illustrates how he, like his friend Bataille, recognises the disruption that 'primitive' culture brings to 'Western' art and specifically to French bourgeois culture. Surprisingly, in Carpentier's accounts of the Exposition there is no mention of the Surrealist counter-exhibition organised by Yves Tanguy and the French Communist Party in the same year. Entitled *The Truth About the Colonies*⁶⁵ and inspired by a quotation from Marx: 'A people which oppresses others cannot be free' (Richardson 1996, 4) the exhibition aimed to educate the French public on the subject of colonial exploitation, and leaflets were handed out detailing imperial abuses of power. Perhaps Carpentier viewed this counter move with some scepticism, believing that the publicity for pre-Columbian art⁶⁶ outweighed the political critique.

⁶⁵For further explanation of both exhibitions, see Tythacott 2003, 63

⁶⁶ See Sophie Leclercq, 'The Surrealist Appropriation of the "Indigenous" Arts', 2006, in which she discusses how Breton and Eluard timed the selling of their own collections of 'primitive' objects to coincide with the *Exposition Coloniale*, thus taking advantage of the trend,

During the 1920s and 1930s, a number of Latin Americans, like Carpentier, studied in France - Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), poet Aimé Césaire (1913-2008) and his wife Suzanne (1955-1966) from Martinique, Cuban painter Wifredo Lam (1902- 1982) and Chilean artist Roberto Matta (1911-2002), some of whom participated in Surrealist exhibitions and publications. By the 1940s, most returned home, their art, like Carpentier's, changed by the revolutionary ideas they had witnessed in French Surrealist practice. In 1932, a group of Martiniquan students living in Paris had proclaimed their wholehearted solidarity with surrealism in a small magazine, *Légitime Défense* (Self-Defense).⁶⁷ As Michael Richardson has noted, the Surrealist ideology had a profound impact on these young black students and how they viewed their own struggle: 'white people themselves cogently accusing their own culture of a barbarism that surpassed anything in the history of the so-called primitive peoples' (1996, 5). The marvellous is arguably central to the art that was produced during this process of transculturation, the point at which discourses of ethnography, 'primitivism' and aesthetics meet. For the Caribbean artists Surrealism provided a radical means of re-appropriating colonial and imperial discourse and for the French a perspective from which to re-appropriate their own European past. Franklin Rosemont's account of Breton's growing involvement with the Caribbean states that collaboration with the *Légitime Défense* group 'gave him an awareness far greater than that of most Europeans of the reality of Caribbean life and, more generally, of the world's black population' (2008, 10).

In 1941, ethnographer Claude Lévi-Strauss and Breton boarded the same boat to Martinique⁶⁸, a coincidental meeting of an ethnographer and a Surrealist that

⁶⁷ The founders of the publication were: Etienne Léro, Jules Monnert, René Ménil, Simone Yoyotte, her brother, Pierre, and a few others. 'For these men and women, Surrealism offered theoretical tools to attack the legacy of colonialism and politics from without ...Emerging from the French black bourgeoisie, which is one of the saddest things on this earth, we declare - and we shall not go back on this declaration - that we are opposed to all the corpses: administrative, governmental, parliamentary, industrial, commercial and all the others.' (quoted in Franklin Rosemont, 2008. "Introduction" in André Breton's *Martinique: Snake Charmer*, [1948], 2008, 10)

⁶⁸ According to his account in *Tristes Tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss boarded the *Capitaine Paul-Lemerle* to Martinique, with a number of French civilians who were fleeing from the German Occupation of the Second World War. He describes his meeting with Breton: 'A lasting friendship was about to

demonstrates the overlaps in intellectual activity of this era. Once settled in Martinique, Breton contributed to the journal *Tropiques* (edited by Suzanne and Aimée Césaire, and former member of *Légitime Défense* René Ménénil), a journal aimed at expressing the ‘emotional roots of our community’. The resulting philosophy, writes Ménénil retrospectively in 1973, is not one, but a ‘panoply of philosophies’ born of historical materialist, Surrealist and spiritual concerns (Richardson 1996, 77). Nevertheless, as Ménénil himself admits, the writing is founded on the complexities of French Surrealist literature ‘from which it contradictorily keeps its distance in a constant engagement’ (72). This sentence could have been written to describe Carpentier’s complicated attitude towards the Surrealist *merveilleux*. In his prologue to *El reino de este mundo*, he compares André Masson’s paintings inspired by the Martinique jungle⁶⁹ with Wifredo Lam’s famous painting *The Jungle* (1943) painted two years after his return from Europe. Masson, he argues, cannot fully grasp the metamorphosis and hybridity inherent to the landscape, ‘it had to be an American painter [...] who taught us the magic of tropical vegetation’ (1995, 85). But Lam, deemed ‘conversant with both the concerns of the European avant-garde and the mythical mysteries of the “creolized” cultures of [his] homeland’⁷⁰, is arguably influenced by European ideas. In 1940, Carpentier recalls how Breton had asked Lam to illustrate his poem *Fata Morgana*, and started collaborating with Césaire on *Tropiques*, but felt that it was already much too late [‘Pero era muy tarde ya’] (1998, 225). With considerable cynicism, he also recounts Breton’s reaction to a voodoo ceremony in Haiti that he had attended with Pierre Mabille.⁷¹ In spite of his protestations regarding Surrealist primitivism, *Creole Dialogues* written by André Breton and André Masson are incredibly similar in tone to Carpentier’s *real maravilloso*: ‘Everything has been like this, unchanged for so long. In the end, one realizes that surrealist landscapes are less arbitrary. Landscapes were destined to find their highest expression in countries like these’. ⁷² The mutual migration

develop between us [...] we discussed the relationships between aesthetic beauty and absolute originality’ *Tristes Tropiques*, [1955], 1976, 26.

⁶⁹ For further information, see Dawn Ades, *André Masson*, London: Academy Editions, 1994.

⁷⁰ Lowery Stoke Sims “Wifredo Lam and Roberto Matta: Surrealism in the New World”. In Terry Ann. R. Sims (ed.), *In the Mind’s Eye: Dada and Surrealism*, 1985, 91

⁷¹ Mabille lived and worked in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, as a surgeon from 1940 until 1945, and invited Breton to speak at the university to coincide with an exhibition of Lam’s painting.

⁷² Rosemont, Franklin, (ed.), 2008, (1948) *Martinique: Snake Charmer* by André Breton, (with text and illustrations by André Masson), 8

between the Americas and Europe during the 1930s and 1940s was responsible for a Surrealist transculturation and the production of paintings, journals and poetry. The presence of key European Surrealists in Haiti, for example, galvanised students and is believed to have contributed directly to the revolution⁷³.

In his extensive work on magic and ethnography, Michael Taussig agrees with Clifford that Surrealism imaginatively re-works the 'predictable compositions of bourgeois reality' through an ethnographic lens, but he defines a key difference between it and Carpentier's *real maravilloso*: Carpentier's magic realism as a Latin American mode built on the ruins of colonial power and class injustice is a 'counter-hegemonic force' (Taussig 1987, 167). From his Marxist perspective, all societies live by fictions that are taken as real (Church, economy, state) and need to be dissected and dismantled. What distinguishes Carpentier's efforts to narrativise these fictions from Surrealist practice, Taussig believes, is his dismantling of the myths of hierarchy that persist in Latin America's hybridised culture. As he becomes a more accomplished fiction writer, Carpentier concentrates on finding a literary framework to express the cultural hybridity specific to Latin America's colonial history, mapping the concurrent suffering and violence across colonised nations. In *lo real maravilloso americano*, Carpentier begins to adapt the Surrealist *merveilleux* to the juxtapositions he believes define Latin America's cultural syncretism. In 1941 on arrival back in Cuba he wrote a series of six articles for *Carteles* entitled 'El ocaso de Europa' ('Europe's decline', or 'The Dusk of Europe') (Echevarría 1977, 32), building on Oswald Spengler's pessimistic account of the demise of European culture in *The Decline of the West* (to which he frequently refers). Carpentier's love-hate relationship with France is central to his work, and perhaps nowhere more so than in his second novel *Los pasos perdidos perdidos* [The Lost Steps, 1953], in which a European academic is thrust into the exotic Venezuelan jungle in search of indigenous artefacts.

⁷³ On the 25th of December, 1940, Mabile had invited Breton to give a lecture at the Rex Theatre in Haiti. See Paul Laraque 'André Breton in Haiti' [1945] in Michel Richardson, *Refusal of the Shadow*, 230.

x. *The Lost Steps: A Poetics of Affect*

According to Echevarría, the paradoxical fact of literary magic realism in Latin America is that 'as Carpentier and modern Latin American writers denounced Western tradition, their search for a Latin American consciousness and mode of expression became, paradoxically, more European' (1977, 19). *Los pasos perdidos* synthesises Carpentier's European and Latin American influences into a critique of Western intellectualism that is nevertheless indebted to European technique and displays a cinematic sensibility in its synaesthetic dynamism. It was inspired by a trip that Carpentier made from Ciudad Bolívar on the Orinoco River to the 'almost unknown interior' of south-eastern Venezuela in 1947, (Shaw 1985, 44) and *Los pasos perdidos* is a reference to a collection of critical essays by André Breton entitled *Les pas perdus* (1924). The title has a double meaning in French, the lost steps, or the not lost⁷⁴, and while not directly addressed in the novel, the shortfalls of European modernism are explored through the eyes of the nameless European-born protagonist and his astrologist-intellectual lover Mouche⁷⁵ in a 'virgin' encounter with the Venezuelan jungle. My reading of the significance of lost steps in Carpentier's novel corresponds to Michael Richardson's definition of Surrealism as being 'always about departures' (2006, 3). The musicologist narrator on his quest for precious 'primitive' instruments starts out repeatedly, each time unsure, in a heightened state of emotion, but ready to discover new paths and confluences.

Los pasos perdidos articulates the experience of falling between two cultures from the point of view of a man who forms passionate links with the extraordinary subjects and objects of the Venezuelan landscape. This is the subjective account of a European musicologist sent into the depths of the jungle to retrieve some precious indigenous instruments, but it is also a metaphorical quest for identity on a larger scale. Explaining that the aim of cinematic poetics should be to represent collective social concerns, Buñuel writes: 'The personal story, the

⁷⁴ In his introduction to Carpentier's novel, Brennan suggests that Carpentier was asserting his own assuredness of artistic direction over the Surrealists in applying the title, 'Introduction', in *The Lost Steps*, 2001, vi

⁷⁵ In Jason Wilson's analysis of the character Mouche in his essay 'Carpentier's Re-Invention of América Latina' he underscores the significance of her name, which translates as 'fly' in English. She is obsessed with the European avant-garde and Wilson refers to her as 'a latter day Nadja', which, while it captures the level of ridicule intended by Carpentier, is not strictly accurate given Nadja's mental demise. See Wilson, 2000, 71.

private individual drama, cannot, in my opinion, interest anyone who is truly alive to his time; if the viewer participates in the joys, the sorrows, the anguish of a character on the screen, it can only be because he sees reflected in them the joys, sorrows, and anguish of society as a whole, and therefore his own' (Buñuel 1995, 138). Carpentier's novel functions around a similar premise, with each subjective episode designed as a wider commentary on Latin American identity. For Echevarría, Carpentier constantly re-works the theme of exile and return 'of individual consciousness and collective conscience, [which] stems from a constant return to the source of modern Latin American self-awareness within the philosophical coordinates of the transition from the Enlightenment to Romanticism' (Echevarría 1977, 27). Certainly Carpentier, like the Surrealists, plays with these questions of freedom and hegemonic force.

Created, like *El reino de este mundo*, from rigorous research based on historical detail and autobiographical experience, *Los pasos perdidos* demonstrates a kaleidoscopic knowledge of myth, folklore, music and art that acts as an archive of social history. Through the prismatic vision and eclectic thoughts of the narrator a version of the modern world unfolds within the ancient jungle. There has been much interest in adapting *Los pasos perdidos* for the screen – in the 1950s the North American actor Tyrone Power bought the rights to the script (but died before making it), and subsequently both Cuban director Tomás Aléa and American actor Sean Penn have expressed their desire to produce it.⁷⁶ Certainly Carpentier's modernist fable corresponds to certain aspects of an avant-garde cinematic poetics (although with a more coherent narrative structure than that of Buñuel's earlier films): it contains condensed poetic description, flashbacks, dizzying perspectives, a layering of multiple temporalities, intercutting of 'still' images that interrupt the 'flow' of the narrative (such as the description of paintings or architecture), vital episodes of a violent or shocking nature, and focuses on the unexpected and mysterious qualities of the reality described. The narrator follows visual clues as one imagines Cabeza de Vaca and his companions to have done, and yet he only finds more layers and clues with

⁷⁶ See 'Alejo Carpentier and Cinema', Ignacio M. Doubrechatt <http://www.cubanow.net/pages/print.php?item=7962> (accessed 7/8/2010) and Prensa Latina, 'Sean Penn to Film Carpentier Novel', <http://www.lademajagua.co.cu/ingles/index.php/culture/350-sean-penn-to-film-carpentier-novel> (accessed 20/8/2010)

gaps in between. The expression of tension between hierarchical systems which reflect the dissemination of capital (or lack thereof) is an allegory for the clash of capitalist (Western) and indigenous cultures, and this dynamic relationship is focalised through a narrator who constantly veers between a state of heightened emotion and a reflective narcissism. Significantly, the layering of personal and social histories is set against the Venezuelan jungle, which seems both primordial in its untouched nature, and modernist in the narrator's descriptions of its confusing spatial and temporal depths.

On the cover of the 1963 Penguin edition of the novel is a reproduction of Max Ernst's *La grande forêt* (The Great Forest, 1927).

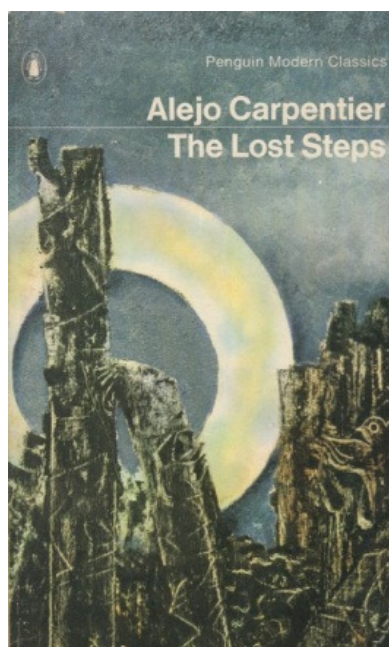


Figure 31: 1963 Penguin edition of the novel *The Lost Steps* by Alejo Carpentier

Dominated by a ringed solar eclipse, Ernst's grattage painting is mysterious and otherworldly. In an essay for *Minotaure* in 1934 'Mystères de la forêt', Ernst describes the forest as 'savage and impenetrable, black and russet, extravagant, secular, swarming, diametrical, negligent, ferocious, fervent, and likeable, without yesterday or tomorrow'.⁷⁷ Similarly, Carpentier's narrator is drawn to the jungle, and its dynamic qualities. Although he too finds it impenetrable, it begins to seduce him, and he reveals its synaesthetic affect to the reader as a

⁷⁷ Max Ernst, 'Les Mystères de la forêt', *Minotaure* 5, 1934, translated by Elizabeth Childs, and cited in Mary Ann Caws, 'Introduction', Caws (ed.), *Surrealism: Themes and Movements*, 2004, 65.

screenwriter might convey an important scene, by listing in detail the visual and sonic qualities of its objects:

Under the water great riddled leaves waved like dominoes of ocher velvet, lures and traps. On the surface floated clusters of dirty bubbles, varnished over by reddish pollen, which a passing fin sent drifting off into the eddy of a pool with the wavering motion of a sea cucumber. A kind of thick, opalescent gauze hung over the opening of a rock teeming with hidden life. [...] There were sounds like the peacock's cry, belly growls, whistles that rose and died away, *things* that passed beneath us, flat to the ground, *things* that dived, hammered, creaked, howled like children, neighed in the treetops, rang bells in the hollow of a hole. I was dazed, frightened, feverish (2001, 160-162).

Each visually prescribed segment seems as if shot in close-up, a montage of objects, of light patterns, juxtaposed with what could be non-synchronous sounds at odds with the images. The narrator is continually thrown into raptures, moved by the intensity of the 'inexhaustible mimetism of virgin nature' (165). But nature also seems to be deceptive, concealing something under its proliferating layers. Steve Wakefield likens this 'conflict' between appearance and reality to a quality in the baroque, engaño, in English, deceit or fraud (2004 80). Thus the alligators lurking in the depths of the swamps, motionless, jaws ready, seem rotten, scale-covered logs.

The vines seemed snakes, the snakes vines when their skin did not simulate the grains of precious woods [...] The aquatic plants formed a thick carpet, hiding the water that flowed below, mimicking the vegetation of the solid earth [...] The jungle is the world of deceit, subterfuge, duplicity; everything there is disguise, stratagem, artifice, metamorphosis. The world of the lizard-cucumber, the chestnut-hedgehog, the cocoon-centipede, the carrot-lava, the electric fish that electrocutes the dregs of the slime (165).

These Surreal objects derived from uncanny natural juxtapositions cause the narrator to experience the jungle in the same way as Ernst describes having experienced the forest: at once familiar and unfamiliar, diametrical and fervent, without yesterday or tomorrow. Each is a sensory reaction, a shift in perception that causes the reality to seem unusual or disquieting. Later when he witnesses

the strange juxtaposition of a Corpus Christi procession modified and performed by Indians he is horrified: 'A kind of fear came over me at the sight of those faceless men [...] perpetuating man's eternal love of the False Face, the disguise, the pretence of being an animal, a monster, or a malign spirit' (116). The marvelous has become grotesque and impenetrable to the narrator in the semiotic confusion of nationality, superstition and masquerade.

The jungle is also the site of primordial emotion, a darkened space in which the narrator is moved by the objects and smells that he experiences and mentally regresses to 'a time when I ceased to know the world only through the sense of touch. As we emerged from the opalescent fog, which was turning green in the dawn, a phase of discovery began for me' (77).⁷⁸ Here the mysterious green fog is reminiscent of thick fog in Brassai's photographs of nocturnal Paris, or the curious light for which Aragon cannot find a source in *Paris Peasant*. The forest and the jungle are mythological and fairy-tale-like, often appropriated by artists as symbols of the unconscious. As a visual manifestation of the unconscious, the otherworldliness is linked to the subjective. The figure of the enchanted wood or forest was also used by Breton to describe the darkened spaces of the cinema, which as Paul Hammond has pointed out (2000, 77), corresponds to Baudelaire's conceptualisation of the universe as a dense forest of symbols. Breton was intrigued by the cinema's 'power to disorient', to allow the viewer to 'abstract himself from his own life when he feels like it [...] as soon as he passes through one of the muffled doors that give on to the blackness. [...] he passes through a critical point as captivating and imperceptible as that uniting waking and sleeping' (Breton, *As in a Wood* [1951] 2000, 73-74). The dark, cocooned space of the cinema facilitates this arrival on the border between conscious and unconscious thought, exterior and interior states of being, as does the labyrinthine jungle for Carpentier's narrator. He allows himself to be directed by the light and shadow of the shifting landscape of the jungle space as if entranced by the cinematic images in front of his eyes. Whilst in the jungle he is powerless to resist the hypnotic rhythms of its sights and sounds. This heightened state seems to mirror the Surrealist 'état d'attente': 'In this rapture, one is lost to the

⁷⁸ The colour green denotes this transformative regression, like the green storm that heralds Ti Noël's 'transformation' at the end of *El reino de este mundo*.

self and saved from its restrictive circumstances. Lost to the self but found to the world' (Ménil, [1941] quoted in Richardson 1996, 92).

At every turn I find Carpentier's prose to be both cinematic and Surrealistic. The marvellous ruins of ancient civilisations, and the strange anthropomorphic shapes of the jungle through which processions of Indians parade with syncretised religious fetishes, recall the chance juxtapositions of the *merveilleux*. The sudden violent murder of a rapist leper, who in Buñuelian fashion is distorted and made monstrous through both his physical deformity and his cruel behaviour, seems to leap out of the page. In addition, a first person narration that emphasises the psychodynamic nature of the journey is added to the free-indirect narration so that inner thought materialises through the introspective words of the alienated Western narrator, the internal monologues a nod to literary modernism's stream of consciousness narratives.

The narrator is our lens, and in the absence of photographic evidence the rare landscape is mediated and distorted through his point of view: 'the landscape reproduces the very precise vision of little-known and rarely, if ever, photographed places' (2001, x). He embodies the contradictions in modern life, the clash of cultural backgrounds, and the impulse to move forward while retaining an interest in the past (both personal and social). Childhood memory, trauma, and desire return to haunt him, and he attempts to find answers in the physical world around him. He realises that something significant is lost, and his journey sets out to address this lack. Carpentier often uses terminology from artistic practice in order to illuminate a particular psychological experience, particularly in scenes in which the narrator tries desperately to articulate his shifting perception of himself: 'Within me another stirred who was also I, and who did not quite fit his own image; he and I were uncomfortably superimposed on one another, like plates handled by an apprentice lithographer in which the yellows and reds do not completely coincide' (234).

The Surrealist superstition of the premonitory sign is employed by Carpentier to signal a link between the inner mind and physical reality, creating a foreshadowing that confuses temporality:

I recall those drops falling on my skin in pleasurable pinpricks as though they had been the first announcement – which I did not understand at the time, of the encounter [...] The origin of everything would have to be sought in the cloud that burst into rain that afternoon with such unexpected violence that its thunderclaps seemed those of another latitude (13-14).

This baroque effect allows a series of events to co-exist within a single image, an image which in addition to bridging temporality also bridges latitudes. Outside in the street, wandering agitated after his premonitory daydream, the narrator begins to run in the rain: ‘As I turned the corner, I crashed head-on into an open umbrella [...] The sight was so funny that I let out a roar of laughter. And just as I was expecting an insult, a cordial voice called me by name: “I was looking for you, but I had lost your name”’ (16). Not only is this chance encounter marvellous, but in the narrator’s irrational laughter at the umbrella, Carpentier nods to Lautréamont’s famous line regarding the incongruous meeting of an umbrella and a sewing machine on a dissecting table, a motif responsible for Breton’s love of the ‘intoxicating atmosphere of chance’ (1988, 24).

Carpentier’s signposting of the Surrealist *merveilleux* functions ironically only until the point in the novel when the narrator arrives in the jungle. As soon as he stands on Latin American soil, his perspective, Carpentier’s perspective, becomes that of the outsider, and the artifice of his New York life and his French lover’s pretensions are replaced by an absolute amazement and bewilderment at the reality in front of his eyes.

In their essay on the globalisation of magic realism, Stephen Hart and Wen-chin Ouyang discuss how magic realist codes ‘can be an excellent vehicle for political views and issues’ (2005, 4). But in order for him to fully grasp the complexity of his own birthplace, it takes Carpentier almost three decades before revising *lo real maravilloso* to better express Latin America’s colonial past. To achieve this he reaches further back into European art-historical discourse, past Surrealism to the aesthetic language that the colonisers forced upon the colonised: the baroque. The next section continues with an examination of the Latin American baroque and its significance as a discourse of resistance for Carpentier, outlined in his revised essay on marvellous realism: ‘Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso’ [The baroque and the marvelous real], which was given as a lecture in Caracas in

1975. Significantly, Carpentier's regeneration of the baroque for a Latin American marvellous became an important cultural metaphor for prominent Latin American filmmakers who were influenced by his work. In addition to Carpentier's cinematic expression of exterior reality inflected with subjective thought, his re-working of cultural syncretism in Latin American art provided subversive content for his followers, and brings us to a new intersection between the marvellous real and the cinema.

xi. A brief explanation of the Baroque: history, style, function

The dual history of the pre-Columbian and colonial (European Baroque) eras provides the legacy for Carpentier's 'modern', 'neobaroque' Latin America. Without denying the colonial past, the Latin American culture of the neobaroque defines what Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup have termed 'the reorigination' of European cultural forms (2010, 7). As Michael Abeyta explains, uncovering the legacies of the cultural past in order to move forward was not straightforward for writers like Carpentier:

The problem was how to adapt to modernizing forces without sacrificing the rich, in its own ways modernizing, but also retrograde baroque heritage. The difficulty lay in how to address this problem without falling into a romanticized, utopian reaffirmation of a pre-Columbian past that also merited scrutiny yet was crucial for the understanding of Mexico's and Latin America's cultures (Abeyta 2006, xi).

The baroque heritage is inscribed on the landscape, the legacy of colonial city planning and reformation: gigantic cathedrals, palaces, facades and gates, fountains and statues. But what distinguishes the European baroque movement from its Latin American equivalent is the fusion of indigenous and European styles that emerged as the colonisers failed to suppress, and in some cases voluntarily adopted, indigenous cultural life. The baroque emerged in the seventeenth century as a Catholic response to the gaining popularity of Protestantism in Europe. An ostentatious art form, it drew attention to the wealth and ideology of its patrons, culminating in the Rococo style of the mid-18th

century⁷⁹, and became for Carpentier and many other Latin American artists a symbol of resistance and spirit for ‘a continent of symbiosis, mutations, vibrations, *mestizaje*, [that] has always been baroque’ (1995, 98).

In Latin ‘baroco’ can mean a wart, or a pearl of irregular shape, in French, extravagance, and in Italian, bad taste. In these interpretations, one would expect something rather vulgar or badly formed, but the ‘irregularity’ also refers to its dynamic refiguring of the classical linearity and stasis of its renaissance predecessors. One of the principal art historians responsible for defining baroque *style* is Roh’s mentor, Heinrich Wölfflin, who pioneered the idea of a cyclical, spiral mechanism in baroque painting. Focusing on style and form, he wrote extensively on the shift from renaissance art to the baroque movement. Comparing the baroque to the earlier Italian Renaissance which saw an obsession with perfect proportion, ‘individually living parts’, he writes:

The baroque uses the same system of forms [as the Renaissance], but in the place of the perfect, the completed, gives the restless, the becoming, in place of the limited, the conceivable, gives the limitless, the colossal. The ideal of beautiful proportion vanishes; interest concentrates not on being, but on happening. The masses, heavy and thickset, come into movement (Wölfflin 1950, 9-10).

It is this movement and the emphasis on ‘becoming’ which later proves to be so meaningful to Latin American artists, a dynamism that is re-appropriated to represent the turbulent struggle and violence of colonialism, and the enormous scale of Latin American ethnological diversity.

Renaissance and baroque artists often drew or sculpted the same subjects and figures from religious and mythological history. Wölfflin examines the shift from the renaissance style’s closed and linear form, planimetric composition, and emphasis on detailed portrayal of each individual part of a body, to the baroque tendency towards painterly and open form, recession and the loss of the individual part in favour of a ‘homogenous mass’ (1950, 157). He sees the baroque as heralding a new attitude to the world, in which colour and light have their own life, and do not just serve the composition; emphasis is on the eye

⁷⁹ Art historian Rudolph Wittkower’s three-volume study on the baroque spans from 1600-1750, ending with the Rococo, see Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy, Volumes One, Two , and Three*, 1999

rather than the object: ‘Only the *appearance* of reality is seized [...] The pictorial form remains indeterminate, and must not settle into those lines and curves which correspond to the tangibility of real objects’ (1950, 21). Sculpture, he argues, becomes more dramatically charged when set to interact with the surrounding architecture, when the movement created by an interplay of light and shadows (windows, niches, and alcoves are essential elements in the composition) transforms the surface of the figure. In contrast to ‘draughtsmanly’ renaissance linearity, the ‘painterly’ style of the baroque is concerned with the sensory impression of the object rather than realism (21). Typically this is achieved in a number of ways, for example, by exaggerating the foreground to create recessionary movement, or in a more fluid, asymmetrical composition that rejects the traditional rectangular limits of the frame thereby introducing ‘dissonance’. This difference is clearly defined in two versions of the religious painting *Supper at Emmaus* which portray the biblical story from Luke’s gospel, Chapter 24, verses 13-22, in which the newly risen Christ appears to his disciples, and they fail to recognise him until he breaks bread at the table. The first is painted by Tiziano Vecelli’s (better known as Titian, 1488/90 – 1576) and the second by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571 – 1610). The former, a calm portrayal of the disciples’ recognition of the resurrected Christ, composed on a single plane, with little suggestion of movement or tension, contrasts starkly with Caravaggio’s version, a portrayal of the same scene, in which the interplay of light and exaggerated foreshortening create dramatic movement and mystery. The realism of the former and the drama in the second demonstrate Wölfflin’s thesis.



Figure 32: Titian *Supper at Emmaus*, c. 1530, oil on canvas, 169 x 244 cm., Musée du Louvre, Paris



Figure 33: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Supper at Emmaus*, 1601, oil on canvas, 54 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 76 $\frac{3}{4}$ cm, The National Gallery, London

For Carpentier, it is Gianlorenzo Bernini's (1598-1680) altarpiece containing the sculpture *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* (c1645-1652) in Rome that exemplifies the style of the European baroque. Working in what Wittkower calls the 'High Baroque' period of 1625-1675, Bernini typically includes drapery of garments (theatrical curtains frame the often swooning and anguished bodies in his sculptures) and emphasises dramatic movement (contorted and outstretched limbs) juxtaposed with elaborate ornamentation.



Figure 34: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa de Ávila, 1645-1652, Height: 3.5m., Cornaro Chapel, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome

Commissioned by Cardinal Frederico Cornaro, Bernini's sculptural ensemble was built in the Cornaro family chapel of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome. It forms the centrepiece of an ornate altar, complete with reproductions of Saint Teresa's life, of the lives of the Cornaro family, a ceiling fresco depicting clouds, angels and the holy dove which is surrounded by the fan of gold metal rods that emulate rays of sunshine. The work is built like a theatre, staging a dramatic scene from Saint Teresa's own autobiography [see appendix iii-3]. Bernini even built a shallow box-like extension in the outer wall of the chapel and glazed the window with yellow glass so as to cast a golden light over the central actors. More than a statue (to which it is often reduced in reproductions) it is an installation, brought alive by natural processes of light and space. Teresa is depicted on the point of spiritual or sexual ecstasy, *jouissance* [see appendix iii-4], her head falling backwards and her eyes closed. Wittkower interprets her 'exalted state of perception' as a mirroring of the viewer's reaction to baroque art in general: 'The method of representation suggests that the entire image of a saint and his vision is the spectator's supranatural experience' (Wittkower 1999b, 2). Persuasion to emotional reaction is a key element in this stage of the baroque movement and requires belief, or at the least suspension of disbelief (also a key element of Carpentier's marvellous): 'Nothing was left undone to draw the beholder into the orbit of the work of art. Miracles, wondrous events, supra-

natural phenomena are given an air of verisimilitude; the improbable and unlikely is rendered plausible, indeed convincing' (Wittkower 1999b, 2).

Wittkower also claims that Bernini's baroque conveys the power of metamorphosis, or as he puts it, transmutation, to transform reality 'magically' through form (1999b, 21). Carpentier defines baroque style as 'art in motion, a pulsating art that moves outwards and away from the centre that somehow breaks through its own borders' (1999b, 93). He is excited by the naked surfaces, the 'horror of the vacuum' which lies at the centre amidst the 'proliferating nuclei' of elaborate ornamentation. The *horror vacui* in the plastic arts is a fear of emptiness, or an anxiety that is compensated for by filling every possible space or ellipsis with objects, decoration, or detail. The term was also used by Siegfried Kracauer in *The Mass Ornament* with reference to a modernity in which an alienated populace lacks faith but fears emptiness (1995, 132). For Carpentier, the baroque symbolises not European decadence, but escape and freedom from the binds of social anxiety; the luminescence and explosive quality represent freedom of the mind to transcend boundaries of any kind. He likens the effect of Bernini's altarpiece to de Chirico's 'caged suns' in which the framework – the cage, the columns surrounding Bernini's sculpture - insinuates entrapment, but cannot contain or limit the energy within.

Carpentier self-consciously anticipates a rebuttal of his claims for the particularity of the baroque that may equate its style with that of the Gothic, but swiftly dismisses such an analysis. The Gothic, he says, is a 'historical style' specific to a period and relegated to the past, but the baroque is a 'human constant', a 'spirit' that can be found in writers as diverse as Caldéron, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Lautréamont, Proust, and Byron. Romanticism and Surrealism, he insists, also developed in the spirit of the baroque. Carpentier's theory of the human constant is derived from Catalan art historian Eugenio d'Ors (1881-1954), whose 1935 book *Lo barocco* was, as Zamora and Kaup have argued, 'the precondition' for re-appropriating the language of the Counter-Reformation to subvert its power (2010, 76). D'Ors' characterisation of the baroque introduces the themes of dynamism, secular pantheism (in which all medium specific arts are connected and borrow from one another), and 'primitive' culture that Carpentier weaves into his own theorisation of the marvellous real:

He [d'Ors] tells us [...] that what the baroque displays is, in fact, a kind of creative impulse that recurs cyclically throughout history in artistic forms, be they literary or visual, architectural, or musical: and he gives us a very fitting image by saying that there is a baroque spirit, just as there is an imperial spirit [...] There is an eternal return to the imperial spirit, historically speaking, just as there is an eternal return of the baroque in art through the ages (1995b, 91).

The baroque ceases to be just a style or an extravagant means of imperial propaganda, and is given new life as a reactionary mode of expression. Moreover D'Ors' words would have had a particular poignancy for Carpentier considering his antipathetic feelings towards Surrealist ethnography: 'at the moment when the baroque was being reborn in an immediate yesterday [...] we have seen blacks and the festishes of savages disembark in Paris to restore elemental symbols to a civilization tired of refinements and rationalities' (Zamora and Kaup 2010, 92). Carpentier builds on d'Ors' theory, taking his own first-hand knowledge of the Surrealist *merveilleux* and inverting it in the same way; the baroque marvellous real is an important socio-political discourse and a syncretic form of artistic expression that for Carpentier resists not only colonialism and imperialism, but also European art history: 'The baroque is always forward-looking and is usually on the upsurge at the very moment a civilization reaches its peak, or when a new social order is about to appear. It can be culmination or premonition' (1985, 108).

The characteristics of Carpentier's syncretic baroque are: violence, action, vigour, movement, will and declaration (1995b, 97). At once a comparison can be drawn between his version of an inclusive, multi-generic, trans-historical baroque and the mode of magic realism for which the dynamism of the marvellous matters more than defining its generic boundaries. In his seminal study of the return of the baroque in the modern era, critic Gregg Lambert points to the multiplicity and diversity of the baroque as its key strength as an analytical discourse: 'Because the baroque is potentially an "empty category", it has often played havoc with the empirical assumptions as the basis of historical narration' (2004, 7). Lambert believes the heterogenic nature of the baroque could be the reason 'why a near-century of criticism has not been able to determine whether, or not, the baroque ever existed as a definite historical or cultural phenomenon' (Lambert, 5). In Gilles Deleuze [1993] and Patricia

McCormack's (2008) accounts of the baroque, (the latter a reaction to Deleuze's theory⁸⁰) the baroque is likened to an unending series of pleats that folds back to its origins.⁸¹ For McCormack, the baroque symbolises intensity; the baroque image constitutes a materialisation of cause and reaction and a materialisation of the process of perception as an event: 'The resonance of any image to reality is irrelevant when arguing an image understood through the baroque. The baroque describes the way in which we are folded with the image, neither why nor what, but how' (2008, 67). She chooses Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* to demonstrate her theory, arguing that the interaction between the viewer and the sculpture is entirely based on emotion and affect:

Her [Teresa's] ecstasy is an invocation of folds of desire present to herself but not to us, present to us but not to her (when we are the angel who causes the ecstasy by perceiving it). We perceive her as she cannot and she herself as we cannot, and always there is desire present to neither we nor she but present nonetheless. *Aspects escape* and are created by both' (2008, 66, my emphasis).

For Carpentier, Latin American baroque is *mestizaje*. The struggle for identity and its images represent the ever present tension in its dialogue between the past and the future. The baroque and the marvellous both startle and provoke, the former through its sheer violence of motion, and the latter as a manifestation of something strange and rare. Combined, they produce a theoretical discourse that is directly transferable to Carpentier's prose and his task of naming and expressing Latin American reality: 'I have to create with my words a baroque style that parallels the baroque of the temperate, tropical landscape [...] faced with strange events that await us in that world of the marvelous real ... we have forged a language appropriate to the expression of our realities' (1995b, 107).

⁸⁰ In *The Fold* (which discusses the enduring philosophical appeal of the baroque) French post-structuralist Gilles Deleuze argues, like Lambert, that the concept of the baroque is more valuable as philosophy than as aesthetic style: 'the Baroque invents the infinite work or process. The problem is not how to finish a fold, but how to continue it, to have it go through the ceiling, how to bring it to infinity.' ([1993], 2007, 34) The baroque façade, he argues, is simultaneously and contradictorily independent from yet connected to mental activity. The baroque is light exploding out of darkness; it is the process of oppositional forces in motion. The baroque can only move forward, but it is always connected to the past.

⁸¹ Mary Ann Caws likens the folds in the baroque to the Surrealists' *cadaver equis*, the folds of the irrational precipitations of desire brought about by chance in play. In both McCormack and Caws' definition of the baroque fold desire forms the connection between each image or piece. This is not necessarily disconnected from a context, but relates back to the history of the subject, the depths of the desiring mind.

xii. New World Baroque:

In *El reino de este mundo*, Carpentier illustrates how the European influence on the Latin American consciousness leads to a gradual process of transculturation. The novel represents this process on many levels, which can be divided into the following: the implementation of a feudal system, an aesthetic syncretism in the cultural arts, the interpenetration of conflicting religious beliefs, and lastly, in the mutual antagonism that provokes revolution in response to hegemonic power. In the struggle to impose or reject the European culture an extraordinary transformation occurs whereby the cultural and social traits of the coloniser and the colonised intersect and are reproduced. In the process of reproduction the colonised may mimic the coloniser (as Henri Christophe's empire illustrates) or vice versa (Pauline Bonaparte's penchant for voodoo). The new *criollo*⁸² and *mestizaje* ethnicities are the result of a blending of cultures commonly exemplified in the figure of Hernán Cortés' interpreter, Doña Marina or *La Malinche* (an indigenous woman that was sold to Cortés by her own people)⁸³. In his commentary on the conquest of America, Todorov perceives *Malinche* to have betrayed her Mexicaness in her submission to European values: 'La Malinche glorifies mixture to the detriment of purity.' (1984, 101) Conversely, Carpentier believes 'mixture' to be a strength because it embodies diversity. He explores these themes in his fiction through the metaphor of the baroque; and in his novels at the heart of the racial and cultural diversification is the horror vacuú, the crisis of identity. As Roberto Echevarría proposes, the search for identity and origins is rooted in the 'being-in-the-making' that the baroque represents; 'of something heterogeneous and incomplete' (1993, 198-9) but this inversion of the coloniser's language took many years and faced much resistance.

Ethnic categorisation was imposed by colonisers to form a class-based economy and is represented in idealised paintings of the time that were intended to strengthen the image of the viceroyalties [appendix iii-5]. The Christianization of the New World was not consistent from region to region, and experienced both success and failure. Conversion to Catholicism proved particularly difficult in

⁸² *criollo* refers to the name given to Latin American Spaniards born in the 'New World'. They were regarded as white, but most were descended from Mestizos (mixed Latin American, (Amerindian) and European descent).

⁸³ For more detail on the history of La Malinche, see Oleszkiewicz-Peralba, 2007; In Ching (ed.), 2007)

regions where there were already advanced, hierarchically ruled communities. Erasing telluric religions and their followers was an impossible task, as was the universally attempted enforcement of a religion that did not translate well to the geological and agricultural environment: 'In the process of evangelization, [the colonisers] also realised that they had to approximate and transculture Catholicism in order to render it accessible to a different culture [...] In the process of changing the Other, they inadvertently changed themselves' (Spitta 57). The shift from a one-way enforcement, to a two-way negotiation, led to a syncretic style in the plastic arts, one which manifests the diversity and contradiction born of conquest. Transculturation was even more complex in Caribbean regions where African slaves resisted Christianization with their own distinctive beliefs.

Art historian Gauvin Bailey finds three levels of transculturation in Latin American religious art – convergence, juxtaposition and synthesis: 'An example of convergence would be the carving of a passionflower on the reduction church of San Ignacio Muní. The Jesuit missionaries would interpret it as a reflection of Christ's Passion while the Guaraní carvers would recognise it as a symbol of the trance-like hallucinogenic state that was a crucial feature of indigenous religion' (2005, 90). Convergence allows contradistinct forms to co-exist within a work of art without merging them, and the meaning of the original can be accentuated. An example of juxtaposition can be found in Mexican atrial crosses in which the original form is transformed as two distinct images combine (much like Ernst's anthropomorphic collages). As Carpentier's friend Desnos recorded in one of his poems: 'Everything on earth is baroque. The boat is no more made for the sea than the sky.' This alignment of the baroque with the Surrealist dissolution of boundaries is very similar in essence to Carpentier's statement that baroque art 'somehow breaks through its own borders' (1995b, 93). Carpentier readily admits that there are elements of absurdity and Surrealism within the baroque. In his descriptions of the jungle in *Los pasos perdidos*, for example, the intermingling of objects bears close resemblance to Mary Ann Caws' description of a Surrealist baroque practice: 'In surrealism nothing stays where it should or used to be [...] The ways the baroque approach teaches us to think about

reversals, upside-downness, and in-outness I would summarize briefly as fascination with what is complex, multiple, clouded, and changeable' (1997, 4).



Figure 35: Atrial Cross, Monastery Agustin de Acolman, Mexico (1555-57)

Friars often used the story of Christ's Passion and permitted the construction of crosses that juxtaposed carvings of Aztec imagery (the arms are replaced with tree trunks, a possible reference to the Tree of Life, but evidence is uncertain) with the instruments of the Passion (crown of thorns, funeral flowers and the mourning figure of Mary, the inscription INRI). We can deduce that this form of sculpture was encouraged in order to facilitate conversion to Christianity, and the resulting work of art intimates a negotiation between the European clergy and the Native. Anthropomorphic figures are common to indigenous and Pre-Columbian art, and the totem (an elongated pole into which is carved a series of figural representations of the natural, cosmological and 'divine') which stood as a focal point of worship and religious identity in many native cultures, represents the fusion of human imagination and natural imagery. For Lévi Strauss, the totem is a visual representation of the convergence of religion, magic and nature. He argues that the relationship between anthropomorphic interpretations of nature and physiomorphic interpretations of human experience allows for reciprocity among religions whereby mutual intersection – transculturation – occurs. If religion is a 'humanisation of natural laws', and magic a 'naturalisation of human actions' (1962, 221), it becomes clear how points of convergence were

found between Catholicism and indigenous religions and how paintings depicting saints, gods, and deities were created from such a varied iconography.

A more naturalist synthesis is evident in portraits of the Virgin Mary in which characteristics of Pre-Columbian goddesses or earth mothers blend seamlessly in an exchange of symbolic colours, the modification of the figures' ethnicity and pose and a range of symbolic objects. Throughout the three hundred years of colonisation, multifarious versions of gods, goddesses, the Virgin Mary, saints and other religious deities proliferated in the plastic arts (often anonymously painted), but approaches to 'divinity' differ wildly. The example below incorporates the Bolivian earth goddess of Potosí mountain into a hybrid celestial scene with archangels that also depicts the symbols of the law brought by the colonisers.



Figure 36: Anon, Virgin of the Mountain of Potosí, 1720, Museo Nacional de Arte, La Paz, Bolivia

The New World that Carpentier finds marvellous is based on such juxtapositions and convergences. As in the scene in *El reino de este mundo* in which Ti Noël finds spiritual inspiration in the icons of Spanish Catholicism, mediation between a variety of belief systems is aided by the cultural objects that convey the religious message. The relationship of object to context, and the powerful sensory reaction that this juxtaposition encourages, is of major significance to Carpentier. As a

result his novels often include detailed passages describing the magical aura of places where such interaction occurs: ‘These places were neither totally material nor completely mental; they were syncretized combinations of the material and mental and cannot be reduced to either’ (Dillehay and Matos 2006, 33).

There are countless examples of transculturation in Latin American art, and the baroque with its gilt-edged saints, ornamentation, and emphasis on heightened emotion combined with indigenous and African iconography, clearly displays the power of the object. The baroque form was deliberately modified either to display contradiction, or to unify diversity, both of which, regardless of intention, served to present a reality in an ambiguous relationship with its origins. It has served to synthesise, to transcribe and objectify a culture with a fragmented and violent history. The baroque assembles a collection of ornaments, objects and themes which are disparate – both in time and place – and yet once framed, their remoteness and dissimilarity are erased and perspective is unbound. If the baroque is situated in a non-place yet recalls very distinct places and people, it occupies an indeterminate position between the real and the imagined. As analysed by Wölfflin and d’Ors, it forms part of a continual historical cycle in which periods wax and wane, but as we have discussed, it also points to rupture and change. The baroque is never completely separated from the past, but it carries many versions of it. In addition, the key to its effectiveness lies within the magical chain of causality that Lambert detects running from the body of the text, to the body of the spectator, and potentially to the socio-political masses (2004). The baroque is principally a work of art that produces affect, and the movement of which Carpentier writes is emotional. It may not ‘speak’ for any particular demographic or social group, yet the baroque as concept has been appropriated by many to express struggle and to provide a philosophical platform from which to discuss transformation and formulate resistance.⁸⁴ Carpentier’s addition of the Latin American baroque to his *real maravilloso* deepens his mode as a geopolitical discourse.

⁸⁴ Taken from Robert Desnos, *Les Nouvelles Hébrides et autres textes, 1922-1930*, 1978, Marie-Claire Dumas, (ed.) Paris: Gallimard, 1978, 198, translated by Mary Ann Caws and cited in Caws (ed.), 1997, *The Surrealist Look: An Erotics of Encounter*, 3.

xiii. Carpentier's Legacy

In 1991, Cuban filmmaker Humberto Solás (1941-2008) made a screen adaptation of Carpentier's 1959 novel *El siglo de las luces* (literally 'The Century of the Lights', but alternatively translated in English as 'Explosion in a Cathedral', and 'A Century of Enlightenment'). The English title 'Explosion in a Cathedral' is also the title of a painting by the seventeenth century French painter Monsù Desiderio (c 1593- death unknown). The painting, which depicts a cathedral at the point of what appears to be an explosion, is a recurring visual motif in the novel.⁸⁵ The narrative traces the impact of the French Revolution in the Caribbean, and the Haitian Revolution in the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique. Following three revolutionary movements it explores the idea of a 'corruption' of revolution also evident in the original novel; Solás's film updates the politics of Carpentier's text for the 'failure of socialism' in 1990s Europe (Martin and Paddington 2001, 13), and as a partial reflection on the current economic downturn in Cuba. But as Jason Weiss observes:

the book was more than a critique of revolutions; rather, what is most significant is conveyed by the irony of its original title. [...] At the close of the eighteenth century the looming presence of the guillotine, and the last waves of the Reign of Terror, were the bitter legacy brought over from the land of reason, suggesting that indeed nothing had changed since the Conquest' (2003, 74).

In the novel historic motifs layered over this intense story of colonial history function as metaphors for European decline (Desiderio's paintings, for example, often depict buildings in a state of ruin and collapse.) The political allegory constructed from descriptions of famous paintings and architecture lends the novel to cinematic adaptation. For Solás there was a certain political urgency to re-writing history for contemporary Cuban audiences. For maximum impact he re-uses Carpentier's baroque marvellous: 'I believe the Baroque style is one in which there are no orthodox rules. It is a free style that has made the analogy between the present and the past possible. The Baroque cruce took me from one period to the next in non-linear terms (Martin and Paddington 2001, 162)⁸⁶.

⁸⁵ For a discussion of the relation of this painting to Carpentier's novel, see Wakefield, 2004; and Wall, 1998.

⁸⁶ This is taken from an interview with Solás on March 29, 1999, translated by Astrid Bayr. This interview trans by Astrid Bayr, March 29 1999.

Earlier, in 1968, Solás had made his first feature film *Lucía*, a story told by three *Lucía*'s, three women from different class backgrounds in a narrative split between three time periods: 1895 (during the Cuban fight for independence against Spain); 1933 (the failed uprising against General Machado); and in the 1960s after Fidel Castro's victorious revolution. Solás describes his film as a product of the most expressive and innovative period in the development of filmmaking in Cuba: 'In short, it was an intense and interesting moment because the revolution was still very nationalistic and autochthonous, and concerned with affirming its legitimacy. And, while *Lucía* was my personal creation, it was also part of this revolutionary moment, affirming our national culture and search for originality' (Martin and Paddington 2001, 5). And, despite earlier remonstrations against European filmmaking, it is redolent of movements that were to make a lasting impression on him: Italian neo-realism, French *nouvelle vague*, English free cinema, and *cinéma-vérité* movements: 'It is based on a very controversial premise, to make three films in one, in which each episode represents a distinct conception of film and photographic style: one of song, one of catharsis, and the other that reflects the obsessions of my life at the time' (2001, 4). He describes an 'experimental' process characteristic of Cuban filmmakers in the 1960s, whereby in attempting to create a new national product, they inevitably made recourse to what he terms the European avant-garde cinema of the period. Solás cites two films made in 1959, Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima, mon amour*, and Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura* (which was actually released in 1960), as having influenced his own filmmaking style: 'It [avant-garde cinema] allowed us to assess and purify our own criteria' (Burton and Alvear 1978, 32). As Surrealist practice had to Carpentier's work, avant-garde cinema contributes to a formal structure in Solás' films (the disruption of chronological temporality, narrative displacement from character development to musical or lighting motifs, for example) that combines with ideological, political components.

As explained in interviews with the pioneering directors of the early Cuban film movement Solás and Tomás Guitérrez Alea (1918-1996), Cuban film culture didn't really exist until after the Revolution (1959) and its stylistic influences had moved on from Carpentier's. In Solás' version of Cuban cinema history,

filmmakers faced problems that did not affect writers or musicians like Carpentier, who he argues could manage to express 'authentic' culture with socialist tendencies. Building a national industry from scratch, filmmakers had two choices: to join the elitist cultural tradition of the ruling class, or to adopt a more 'clandestine' culture: 'But in fact the choice was not that simple, because the clandestine culture had been permeated for decades by the influence of elitist forms, and there was a tendency to convert all cultural expression into products of a consumer-oriented culture' (Burton 1986, 144). Solás acknowledges that they (those involved with the ICAIC - Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos [Cuban Institute of Film Art and Industry], first established in 1959 - were encouraged to employ avant-garde and mainstream styles from North America and Europe (most notably French New Wave and Italian Neorealism). For Solás this proved detrimental as 'these influences alienated us from our indigenous cultural forms and ... the explosive dynamism of the Revolution and its goals for artistic culture' (Burton 145). Carpentier and filmmakers like Solás were similar in that they wanted to produce an authentic national cultural product, but Carpentier had formed close personal ties in France and distanced himself somewhat from revolutionary activity in his homeland, and was as a result more greatly seduced by European culture. For Solás travelling to Europe meant strengthening his critical perspective, and his rejection of European culture went much further than Carpentier's: European film seemed 'degrading, useless obsolete. I closed my eyes to all forms of artistic expression that came from the developed world, and this definitely limited me' (Burton 146), a limitation that he readily admits was immature, and which was later redressed, as his comments on the making of *Lucía*, above, illustrate. Aléa, who had studied in Italy, found that Italian Neorealism provided an initial model for his filmmaking, a means of capturing an unstable reality: 'All we had to do was set up a camera in the street and we were able to capture a reality that was spectacular in and of itself extremely absorbing, and laden with meaning' (Burton, 124). This resonates with Carpentier's post-France homecoming and his dictate that to touch the marvellous in Latin America one had only to reach out and grab it. But where Carpentier's revolutionary fervour is often softened by his tendency for lyricism, and lacks the directness of Surrealism, Cuban revolutionary films tended towards documentary

realism.⁸⁷ In the spirit of Surrealism, the ‘manifesto’ form proved an important vehicle for expressing and disseminating ideals and aims, contributing to the conceptualisation of a nationally and politically specific ‘Latin American cinema’ (see chapter three). Carpentier was keen to promote revolutionary ideas in his art, but his French avant-garde formation and an aesthetic palette dominated by inter-war psychology draws him to complex ontological concerns.

The influence of Carpentier’s syncretic prose – the marvellous as archive – is easy to trace in Cuban films that attempt to portray the polyvalent strands of their nation’s history whilst simultaneously reaching beyond the confines of that history; and that several of Carpentier’s novels, and one short story, have been adapted for the cinema is significant. In addition to Solás’ film above, to date the following have been made into feature length films: *El Recurso de Metodo* [The Reasons of State, 1976] by Chilean director Miguel Littin in 1978; *Concierto Barroco* [Baroque Concerto, 1974] by the Mexican director Paul Leduc; and the short story *El derecho de asilo* [Right of Asylum] 1972) by Cuban producer Octavio Cortázar and screenwriter Walter Rojas. Following in Carpentier’s footsteps, filmmakers like Solás and Alea realised that revolutionary ideas could be found in experimental art, and they, like he, acknowledged the avant-garde’s interest in the cultural fabric of a given society:

I used to think that it was political ideas and the economic system that determined and defined the nation. Certainly they are critical contributing elements, but the concept of nation is configured in film, literature, and poetry, and is not definitively articulated until signified through the images and sounds of the country. In this century this is an imperative (Solás 2001, 11).

Carpentier recognised this political potential in the cinema early on in his journalism of the 1920s and 1930s, and towards the end of his life, he reappeared as the subject of a series of films directed by documentary filmmaker Héctor Veitía in 1973, in which he appeared declaring his ideas about his work, Cuban music, and Surrealism, directly to the camera. Although Carpentier never made any feature films, his writing was clearly informed by a cinematic sensibility.

⁸⁷ In the first 24 years after the Revolution, the ICAIC produced 112 full-length feature films, 900 documentary shorts, and more than 1,300 weekly newsreels, illustrating the tendency toward documentary subjects. See Julianne Burton, ‘Film and Revolution in Cuba. The First Twenty-Five Years; in *New Latin American Cinema*, Vol.2, Michael Martin (ed.), 1997, 126

Moreover his baroque provocation, which sought to glean new meanings and revolutionary ideas from the overlapping remnants and artefacts of past cultures, as laid out in his 'manifestos', evidently informed a corpus of films and a style of filmmaking that eventually ended up being discussed in 'Western' academic institutions.

As we shall see in the next chapter, Latin American cinema was, just as the early European avant-garde had been, shaped by the various manifestos and labels attributed by the filmmakers themselves: 'didactic', 'revolutionary', 'direct', and 'imperfect' cinema. Here the objective rather than the style is emphasised. Yet the theoretical discourses of 'magic realism', 'Surrealism' and 'neobaroque' have persisted in critical accounts of many of the films that have been produced since the 1960s, especially those made in the last 30 years. Significantly, in 1986, a North American Marxist academic applied the term magic realism to a selection of films that he happened to see at a film festival in Havana, two of which are Latin American, one Colombian and one Venezuelan, and the third Eastern European, Polish. Roh and Carpentier actively sought to produce 'magic realism' in their work – Roh through photomontage, and Carpentier in fiction – but Latin American filmmakers had no such agenda. Why, then, should magic realism be used to describe these films, and how do they connect to either Roh or Carpentier's manifestos for the mode?

Chapter 3 – Fredric Jameson’s Cinematic Magic Realism, Marxism, Affect and the Historical Avant-Garde

Marxist critic-philosopher Fredric Jameson has, over the last six decades, developed an analysis of the cultural politics of global capitalism. Jameson’s work spans a multiplicity of disciplines, including literature (with which he is most often associated), art history, and film studies. Of particular relevance to this study of magic realism are Jameson’s ideas regarding the status of the work of art as artefact and ideological tool. In the late 1970s and early 1980s Jameson wrote extensively on modernism, posing questions about the stylisation and politics of modernist works of art and literature. (‘The Ideology of the Text’, 1975; *The Political Unconscious*, 1981; *Fables of Aggression*, 1981) These earlier texts address the modernist axioms of individualism, alienation, newness and emotionality and ask whether they still have currency or relevance in the 1980s. Taking the modernist art object as microcosm, representing ‘vital episodes’ in cultural history, Jameson’s Marxist analysis examines the ‘essential mystery’ of the socio-historical past (1981, 19). In 1984 these ideas culminated in the first of a series of essays, ‘Postmodernism and Consumer Society’, that tried to make sense of the cultural changes - primarily in Europe and North America, but also globally – in the new economic order and the age of computerized technology.

Studies of postmodernism were plentiful, but Jameson’s work on the subject stands out, not least because of the diversity and breadth of the examples he employs to illustrate his thesis, particularly non-canonical, avant-garde and marginal fiction, painting, architecture, photography and film. He subsequently went on to write a series of critical evaluations of these cultural shifts, shifts that reference similar concerns and issues to those often addressed in magic realist studies: the discourses of marginalised groups, resistance to colonial or totalitarian power, the coexistence of realism and ideological or utopian narrative in literary and cinematic works. Indeed, he wrote two essays specifically focused on magic realism and film (‘On magic realism in film’, 1986, and ‘Soviet magic realism’, 1992) that are linked to his wider ideas regarding the negative

dialectics¹ of Marxist readings of hegemonic capitalism. It is the aim of this chapter to offer a hypothesis about why Jameson incorporated the mode of magic realism into his work at this time, and to signal the ways in which Rohian and Carpentierian legacies can be traced in his ideas. To date, this is the only substantial theorisation of cinematic magic realism that considers the mode's artistic past, aesthetic qualities *and* its geographical and political implications for a theory of postmodernity.

i. From geopolitical to aesthetic magic realism

There is a clear distinction between a purely anthropological magic realism that incorporates post-colonial struggles into the 'magical' rituals of indigenous peoples, and a magic realism that, like Roh's *magischer realismus*, relies on mysterious affect and a metamorphosis of perception to transform or transcend the real world. Magic as Jameson defines it for cinematic magic realism is neither religious nor spiritual. Most importantly, it does not escape the binds of social or historical reality, but illuminates the fractures within. It would, therefore, prove futile to attempt to fit 'On magic realism' into a body of pre-existing critical discourse on literary magic realism in which magic corresponds to the indigenous rituals and the folk histories of Latin American and other post-colonial or marginal literature. Although the 'anthropological' aspects of Jameson's theorisation have been appropriated by many, some critics have found his 'failure' to address the more typical aspects of literary magic frustrating. Arguing that his Marxist approach in 'On magic realism' does not define magic and only identifies the 'material conditions' of the 'realist part of magic realism', Eva Aldea has suggested that the reader is left unable to determine how magic 'works' (2011, 109).

¹ This term derives from Theodor Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* [1966], in which Adorno advocates a materialist epistemology to examine what he believes to be a negative human identity. He makes the distinction between Hegel's 'positive' analysis of emergent identity – created in the relations between thought and being, subject and object world – and replaces it with his own 'negative' version, in which he asserts that identity is achieved negatively through social suppression and regulation. In place of diversity and difference or originality, he argues, socially constructed boundaries restrict the growth of identity, thus negating its potential (1973, 143). His motivation is human suffering: 'Suffering is the corporeal imprint of society and the object upon human consciousness' (1973, 17-18), and he attempts to uncover the historical dynamic of suffering hidden within the object world.

However, Jameson's theorisation of a cinematic mode does indeed offer an explanation for how magic 'works': it involves the 'radicalisation' of narrative (the synthesis of form and plot) and of history (a history with gaps) mediated through visual imagery that foregrounds the mysterious and strange, and that signifies the confused and otherworldly 'beyond-space' of the human mind. Yet, uncovering his aesthetically defined mode proves difficult if not re-read through earlier essays that cover parallel themes with a similar methodology. In his definition of cinematic magic realism, Jameson's use of key terms: affect, the event, condensed narrative, and libidinal intensity, seems to take a prior understanding of his earlier work for granted. These two essays are difficult to comprehend without an understanding of concurrent ideas that were circulating in his writing from the late 1970s and into the early 1990s. I will argue that Jameson's famous theorisation and subsequent revision of the socio-political and art-historical shift from modernism to postmodernism – a dissatisfaction with his own theoretical categorisations, the influence of non-canonical art from Latin America, the Soviet Union, Africa and Asia, and his obsession with the production of affect in painting and film – can all be found in his discussion of 'Third World' cinema and magic

ii. **'On magic realism in film': the socio-political history 'with gaps'**

Jameson's first exploration of magic realism occurs in his 1986 essay 'On magic realism in film' in which the opening sentence reads: 'The concept of "magic realism" raises many problems, both theoretical and historical' (1986a, 301). The antinomy at the heart of the mode – the relationship between the represented real and the magic or 'eccentric' (to use Zamora and Faris's term) element of difference – is said to offer 'a possible alternative to the narrative logic of contemporary postmodernism' (1986a, 302). Emerging as a form of modernist expression and evolving throughout the twentieth century, the mode has come to stand for historical longevity and cultural metamorphosis. Jameson adds that the contradictory criticism the mode has received in attempts to delimit it – from Lacanian, Freudian, ethnographic, postcolonial, postmodern, and other literary angles - gives it a 'strange seductiveness' (302). From the outset, he signals that magic realism shares some of the characteristics of neighbouring categories. The question is how cinematic magic realism narrativises the socio-

historical differently, and to what ends. Thus, where many literary critics have focused on the supernatural aspects of magic realist texts, Jameson begins with social and political realities, later pondering on how they are transformed by the 'eccentric' elements.

Given the context of magic realist criticism in the late 1980s, it is significant that Jameson should attribute what was primarily being discussed as a Latin American literary trend to a Polish film, thus anticipating Zamora and Faris's call for a wider geographical consideration of the mode in their 1995 anthology. He recalls how Agnieszka Holland's 1981 film *Goraczka* [Fever] about a group of Polish revolutionaries had put him 'on the track' of magic realism, (302) albeit with his own 'private' understanding of the term. He notes the unlikely affinity between this film and a primarily Latin American literary phenomenon: 'Poland in general, and the Polish revolutionary movements of 1905 in particular [...] seemed an unexpected and peculiar enough reference point, until its affinities with certain Latin American films grew clearer to me' (302). In December 1984, Jameson attended the Sixth Annual Film Festival in Havana, Cuba. As footnotes to 'On magic realism' tell us, he was impressed with what he saw at this festival and in the schools he visited in the area. In fact, he dedicates the essay to the Cuban revolution, and makes recourse to Carpentier's *real maravilloso americano* several times. Jameson explains that he first discovered the term magic realism in the context of North American painting of the mid 1950s, but it was soon superseded by literature.

Although he briefly mentions Roh in his short introduction to the essay, his main source of inspiration is clearly Carpentier, whose *real maravilloso* speaks to him of the commitment to social transformation through art. He paraphrases Carpentier for the reader, taking up the argument that magic realism (he never uses the actual translation *marvellous*) is 'a poetic transfiguration of the object world itself – not so much a fantastic narrative, then, as a metamorphosis in perception and in things perceived' (1986a, 301). This statement demonstrates an understanding of the importance of the distinction between fantasy – a flight from the real – and magic realism's revelation of the marvellous within the real. It also recalls the modernist emphasis on 'objectivity' and transformation stemming from artistic responses to technology and 'mass' culture. In the

Marxist object-world the subject and the exterior world are interrelated and reciprocal. Jameson endorses Carpentier's move to reformulate the Surrealist marvellous into an anthropological mode in which the struggles against colonialism in Latin American nations are depicted in terms of 'a reality which is already in and of itself magical' (191).

The timing of Jameson's visit to Cuba and his attendance at the film festival exposed him to two Latin American films that led him to Carpentier, rather than to Roh and painting. These were Francisco Norden's *Condores no entierran todos los días* [A Man of Principle, Colombia, 1984], set during the decade known as *La Violencia* following the assassination of populist leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán Ayala in 1948; and Jacobo Penzo's *La Casa de Agua* [The House of Water, Venezuela, 1983] in which a young academic in the 1920s gives up his career to devote his energies to fighting the military government. Each of these films, like Holland's *Fever*, reworks the historical past, and deals with themes of corrupt political power and violent uprisings. Each film features a male protagonist who seeks to transform his social environment but is ultimately tortured and killed. Jameson recalls how he was struck by their 'shared features' (1986a, 130): the historical-political background, a particular manipulation of colour and the narrative function of violence.

While these films may share the ideologies of *Cinema Novo* or Third Cinema, they operate very differently aesthetically. Holland (the only female director included in Jameson's analysis) is known for films that depict racial and sexual discrimination, but she also directed a film adaptation of Frances Hodgson Burnett's classic English children's story *The Secret Garden* (1993) and is a popular, even mainstream, figure in her native Poland. Francisco Norden, according to John King, was one of a number of filmmakers who made commercials and documentaries for 'local capitalist enterprises' that looked nothing like *Cinema Novo*. However, at a time when new Latin American Cinema was still in its infancy, Norden's films 'reveal both a technical quality and a certain depth of vision' (King 2000, 208). Jacobo Penzo, a documentary filmmaker and critic, is the closest to Third Cinema in his 'direct'² approach to

² For more on 'direct cinema', see Jean-Louis Comolli's, 'Detour by the Direct', in Christopher Williams, ed. *Realism and the Cinema*, 1980.

filmmaking. His films enact a transformation in perception of the exterior world through self-reflexive manipulation, for political affect. Each of these directors produces a form of realism in his or her vivid portrayal of political and economic circumstances, but it is a realism made strange by what Jameson refers to as 'intensities' and 'vital' episodes, which create uncertainty and contradiction.

Despite the varied conditions of their production (national and artistic), the three films share a commitment to action against totalitarian and capitalist systems, each offering bleak, anti-nostalgic endings. As we shall see, Jameson's analysis results more in an impression than a completed theorisation of magic realism. He is interested in the ways in which the realism, particularly the historical narrative, is disrupted, and how hegemonic social structures are split wide open when viewed from strange or non-normative perspectives. What is lacking from his analysis is an elaboration of what constitutes the strange and non-normative. Instead, he provides several key examples of how affect³ is created through a manipulation of the colour palette and the eruption of 'vital' episodes and 'condensed' images into these diegetic worlds. I shall argue that his selection of films, which have clearly not been chosen for their Márquezian magic or their fantastic juxtapositions, begin to formulate an alternative vision of cultural postmodernism that is firmly rooted within the ideology of modernism. This analysis will begin with an overview of the principle thematic concern in 'On magic realism', which is that of the representation of history (especially political history).

iii. Late Capitalism: Correspondences between the Socio-Historical and the Cultural

For a critic such as Jameson whose dictum is 'always historicize' (1981, 9), the concepts of modernism and postmodernism cannot be viewed simply as styles,

³ Jameson's use of the word 'affect' is significant to his theorisation of magic realism; he uses it to describe both cognitive and instinctual responses to screen objects. In his essay "Trauma, Pleasure, and Emotion in the viewing of *Titanic*: A Cognitive Approach", 2009, Carl Plantinga presents a 'cognitive-perceptual' theory of emotion in which he describes 'structured mental states' as opposed to 'shapeless feelings'. He concedes that the line between emotion and affect is unclear, but offers the hypothesis that whereas emotions have a stronger cognitive component, 'affect' can be conceived of as "'primitive" feeling, states such as moods, affective mimicry and contagion (by which affect is "caught" by or transferred to a viewer)' 239 'Affect is temporal' 255

nor as temporally limited 'periods'. A Marxist view of history is *transhistorical*⁴ and does not operate in a purely linear fashion, but relies on the experience of the present to interpret the past. Jameson explains that to historicize in dialectical thought one must consider the object and its historical origins in tandem with the path of the subject and the historicity of concepts, genres and boundaries that have shaped his or her understanding of things and the world up until the present moment. Both individuals and objects are tied to a wider social history that corresponds to a cultural evolution that has no hard and fast temporal or spatial limitations. He argues that any traces of the past, whether physical objects or ideas, are neither new, nor neutral, because they have been transmitted to the present through the ideological patterns of prior cultures and societies. We read our environment, our exterior world, through the filter of prior understandings and knowledge passed down in the language of our ruling systems and our social hierarchies. In order to make sense of this global web of metanarratives⁵, Jameson adopts a historical trajectory that had already been formulated by Marxist historian Ernest Mandel (1923-1995), in which three main transitions in the spread of capitalism are noted and discussed. In 1972, Mandel wrote the first major reconsideration of Marxist economics for twentieth century capitalism, *Late Capitalism*, in which he begins by defining what he sees as the most complex problem for Marxist theory: the relationship between the general laws of the motion of capital (periods of equilibrium, disequilibrium, expansion, war, crisis, trends in development) and the history of the capitalist mode of production. In times of conflict, and during intense periods of industrialisation or mechanisation that affect labour and transportation the production of capital may be accelerated or decelerated. Consequently modes of production proceed over time at varying rates influenced by factors such as migration, colonisation,

⁴ For example Ian Buchanan explains how Jameson's transhistorical approach in *Marxism and Form* is capable of 'cracking open the opacities of the past' without anchoring the analysis to a particular point in time. 'Transhistorical', he continues, is the opposite of ahistorical, which 'turns the past into a photonegative of the present' (Buchanan 2006, 4), a criticism which Jameson directs at Warhol's monochrome *Diamond Dust Shoes* in his introduction to *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

⁵ Meta-narrative is a term disseminated by Jean-Francois Lyotard in *La Condition Postmoderne [The Postmodern Condition]*, 1979, that refers to universally applied social and cultural discourses and theories. Lyotard believed that these dominant grand narratives (legal, political, national, psychological) were subject to an intense fragmentation and dispersal in the postmodern age. See Jean-Francois Lyotard, 1983.

or international trade.⁶ To guide his Marxist-historical analysis, Mandel divides the history of capitalism into three stages: 1) the classical or national market capitalism (theorised by Marx); 2) the moment of monopoly capitalism or the stage of imperialism (theorised by Lenin); and 3) the post Second World War global phase that he terms ‘late capitalism’⁷, in which a combination of past modes and the present mode of increased mechanisation and full industrialisation result in an uneven spread, both an acceleration and deceleration of capital accumulation:

The specific socio-economic formations – “bourgeois societies” and capitalist economies - which arose in these different areas in the course of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries and which in their complex unity (together with the societies of Africa and Oceania) comprise “concrete” capitalism, reproduce in varying forms and proportions a *combination* of past and present modes of production, or more precisely, of varying past and successive stages of the present mode of production (1971, 23, Mandel’s italics).

Jameson’s work on the cultural rise and fall of modernism in *The Political Unconscious* (1981) and later in his lengthy dissection of postmodern culture in *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), clearly benefits from Mandel’s theorisation of a layered, multi-national capitalism that responds to disequilibrium. Jameson applies Mandel’s three-staged framework to his own corresponding historical analysis of three cultural (artistic) shifts: the moment of realism in literature; the moment at which high modernism emerges; and the waning of modernism and rise of postmodernism. The dates of each of these movements have been widely debated and Jameson’s thesis can only recognise general commonalities between artistic production and the acceleration of capital. He visualises these stages as a continual flow of ideologies that are formed, then disputed or partially rejected, and ultimately re-formed, consistent

⁶ In an interview with South Korean cultural critic Paik Nak-Chung in 1989, Jameson reveals another influence on his theory of overlapping periodization, stating that his term ‘unevenness’ stems from Ernst Bloch’s *ungleichzeitig* (nonsynchronous), a theoretical term denoting the penetration of the present (the ‘Now’) by the remnants of the past. Bloch’s text examines the spread of late capitalism through the cultural and political tendencies of the German peasantry of the 1930s, a demographic, nonetheless, that is a microcosm of Jameson’s global model. The same diversity and hybridity that Jameson assigns to the transmigratory and postcolonial cultures in Latin America, for example, are here in Bloch’s model found within a social group that Jameson all too often tends to assign uniformity – the peasantry.

⁷ For further information on these distinctions see Ernest Mandel’s *Late Capitalism*, 1975, translated by Joris De Bres.

with historical shifts in capitalist hegemony. For example, Jameson articulates realism as an effect of capitalist quantification:

I would suggest that realism - but also that desacralized, post-magical, common sense, everyday, secular reality which is its object - is inseparable from the development of capitalism, the quantification by the market system of the older hierarchical or feudal or magical environment, and thus that both are intimately linked to the bourgeoisie as its product and its commodity (1975b, 9).

The age of realism in literature was a movement with roots in the eighteenth century Enlightenment, and marked a cultural turn away from myth, magic and transcendence. Jameson argues that realism was an 'aesthetic false consciousness' (1975b, 9) in which the objective reality that was being so painstakingly depicted was actually a representation of dominant social discourse rather than any transparent mimetic translation of truth or fact (a view made transparently clear in Carpentier's *El siglo de las luces*). He notes how the new 'realism' began to fall out of favour with artists and writers as the nineteenth century came to a close, heralding a return to a more 'subjectivized' and symbolic representation that peaked in modernist avant-garde responses to the war and commodification of the first three decades of the twentieth century.⁸ As Jameson maps the theoretical shift between differing modes of capitalist production, he finds that it becomes necessary to interrogate and dissolve these very same theoretical boundaries. This dialectical process is tested against Mandel's 'third stage' of late capitalism, a postmodern culture that Jameson argues to be lacking in 'affect' (a complex

⁸ Ultimately, however, modernism, like realism, says Jameson, becomes an ideological discourse: 'all modernistic works are essentially simply cancelled realistic ones' (1975, 16). He explains this cancellation as a shift in the 'decoding' of reality. Dating the emergence of the modernist novel to a period of 'fatigue' with the 'demystification' characteristic of the 'realistic, middle-class, secular era' (1975b, 16), he describes how the secular narratives of realist literature are exchanged, in modernist works, for 'some hypothetical destiny of modern man in general' (1975b, 16) be that social, psychological or religious. This new (cancelled realist) hypothesis results in an highly stylised imaginary narrative that is 'symbolic and modernistic' but must nevertheless be interpreted in the same manner as 'the older, realistic novel' (1975b, 16). In fact, Jameson argues that any symbolism or abstraction of ideas presented in the modernist novel, necessarily magnifies the reader's need to recreate a recognisable chronology and reality. To illustrate this thesis, he chooses Alain Robbe-Grillet's novel *La jalousie* [Jealousy, 1957], which was conceived by the author as a direct attempt to disengage from the binds of realist literature. It is heavily stylised to achieve chronological disruption and depicts an obsessively objectified and minutely detailed reality. In Jameson's reading, its 'realistic core' - the 'concrete' emotion of jealousy - is made to seem empty and abstracted (cancelled) and the reader must recode it afresh 'in terms of its own sign-system' (1975, 18).

term involving cognition, sensation, emotion, whose ramifications will be discussed at length below). The question of a presence or absence of ‘affect’ is the central proponent of his analysis, and subsequently leads him to identify an alternative mode of aesthetic production.

iv. The Geopolitical Turn: Post-colonialism, Third Cinema and the Move towards Carpentier’s Latin American magic realism.

In 1986, Jameson wrote an article that appeared in *Social Text* entitled ‘Third World⁹ Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism’. It discusses how literature written outside the late capitalist enclaves of Europe, Canada, and North America offers new perspectives for commodified art in the postmodernist age. Due to its proximity in publication date to ‘On Magic Realism in Film’ the two articles have often been viewed in combination as a single volume (see for example Aldea, 2010). While this is not the case, they certainly share ideas about non-canonical art. Jameson famously argues that literature ‘looking at ourselves from outside’ can rejuvenate criticism (jaded to a point of frustration with aesthetic and philosophical ‘isms’) and regain a ‘depth of experience’ lost or blocked in First World works. Despite employing the traditions of the Western novel, Third World writers are argued to produce texts that are ‘alien to us at first approach’ (1986b, 69). This is due not only to the exoticism of unknown geographies, but also to an overt politicization that combines public concerns with subjective states of being. In contrast to the situation in the First World in which we can only view the *public* world of political and economic power as separate from the private realm of an individual or community, a Third World text, he argues, even those with highly subjective stream of consciousness narratives, typically projects a politically invested view: ‘individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society’ (1986b, 69). In the same year Jameson moves from literary to film analysis, nevertheless connecting it back to Carpentier and his literary Latin American marvellous realism. The possibilities for a rejuvenated ‘First World’ aesthetics and a revolutionising of dominant ideological film practice now become central to his revision of the cultural shift from modernism to

⁹ Jameson uses ‘Third World’ and ‘third-world’; outside of direct citations I shall use capitals without hyphenation.

postmodernism. Contrasted with 'Third World' art, the superficiality that he sees in works such as *Diamond Dust Shoes* or the nostalgic pastiche of Coppola's *Godfather Trilogy* is claimed to be geopolitically limited.

'Third World Literature' caused considerable consternation and dispute amongst postcolonial scholars after its first publication in 1986 (Lazarus 2004) due mainly to Jameson's use of the moniker 'Third World', and his tendency to essentialise, or generalise, the cultural practices of societies not his own. The term 'Third World' originates with a 1952 article by French demographer Alfred Sauvy that defines countries in Asia, Africa, Oceania, and Latin America as underdeveloped due to poverty, high mortality and birth rates, and a dependency on so-called 'advanced' countries. It stems from the medieval category of the 'third estate' in which a class system separates the commoner from the nobility and the clergy (Jackson 2010, 835). One of the main problems of such a designation is its conflation of the diversity and cultural specificities of many countries into a single category based on their colonial pasts and underdeveloped economies. As the Martinique-born anti-colonialist Frantz Fanon points out, each colonized nation is comprised of the patterns of struggle, suppression, compromise and revolt that occur between settlers, bourgeois natives, native intellectuals and the rural masses. He reminds us that:

culture is first the expression of a nation, the expression of its preferences, of its taboos and of its patterns. It is at every stage of the whole of society that other taboos, values and patterns are formed. A national culture is the sum total of all these appraisals; it is the result of internal and external extensions exerted over society as a whole and also at every level of that society (1961, 196).

Thus the category Third World is wholly unable to represent such social and ethnic diversity or the courses of 'development' that it may take. Like many prescriptive terms applied by dominant hegemonic powers to subordinated populations, it was challenged and redefined by the inhabitants of those populations that it sought to demarcate. Third World cinema or literature was reappropriated in the 1960s by Fanon's 'native intellectuals' as Third cinema (or literature) – with the word 'world' added only to refer to themselves as seen by the coloniser. Throughout Latin America, young filmmakers began to use the term 'third' to describe a phase in the history of filmmaking, rather than as a

negative description referring to their economic status within the global capitalist system.

In Argentina in 1969, documentary filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino proposed a radical approach to art for and by the people in their influential manifesto 'Towards a Third Cinema'¹⁰. Their ideas were the embodiment of Fanon's 'third' phase in the evolution of art in colonised nations¹¹, in which the transformation of rules and boundaries - established first by the settlers, and then by the dictatorships that replaced them - was the ultimate aim. Unlike the 'perfect' bourgeois Hollywood capitalism of the first phase, and the nihilistic European new wave art cinema of the 'petit-bourgeois'¹² in the second, third cinema sought to turn the perception of an underdeveloped or imperfect cinema back onto audiences. The authors argue that revolutionary filmmaking must resist the 'pseudo-objectivity' (1969, 5) of First World mass media and mainstream art in order to create films that remind spectators in Latin America, or Africa, or Asia, that they must always challenge the familiar and never accept it. This imperative was not restricted to narrative content, but extended to the imperfect 'look' of a film. Degraded film stock, or a deliberate variation of the aspect ratio or frames per second decreed by Hollywood, were strategies employed by filmmakers designed to emphasise their uncompromising resistance to dominant film culture. Solanas and Getino's 1968 film *La Hora de los Hornos* [The Hour of the Furnaces]¹³ is a two-part political documentary, a

¹⁰ Getino and Solanas were the first to use the term 'Hacia un Tercer Cine' *Tricontinental* no. 13, October 1969.

¹¹ Fanon notes the following three phases in the development of artistic output in colonised nations: firstly in a period of 'unqualified assimilation' (Fanon, 179) the artist mimics the styles of the occupying nation (Symbolism and Surrealism were particularly influential, he notes). Secondly, the artist then realises that he (sic) should be connecting with the people, and relies on memories and old legends to reconnect with a culture that he reinterprets through the 'borrowed aestheticism' (179) of the coloniser. And thirdly a 'fighting phase' which best describes the work of Solanas, Getino and others, where the artist strives to 'awaken' the people and drive them towards revolutionary activity and a 'new reality'.

¹² Solanas describes the distinguishing features of Third Cinema and the extent of its influence in 'The influence of Third Cinema in the world' [*L'influence du troisième cinéma dans le monde*], published in *CinémaAction*, 1979 and cited in Paul Willemen, 'The Third Cinema: Notes and Reflections', 1989, 9

¹³ Other films made in the late 1960s such as Brazilian Glauber Rocha's *Terra em Transe* [Earth Entranced], 1967; or Cuban Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's 1968 *Memorias del Subdesarrollo* [Memories of Underdevelopment] deal with themes of neo-colonialism, of revolution, oppression and civil war and were indicative of a Third Cinema movement that through various methods (reportage, montage, poetic documentary, politicised fiction) sought to emphasise the hunger and suffering of the Latin American masses.

carefully constructed polemic that intercuts newsreel footage and grainy newspaper images with specially filmed interviews and everyday scenes of both the working and bourgeois classes. It shows the neo-colonial violence, the hunger of the Argentinian people, the penetration of North American culture, and, in the second part, calls the various countries of Latin America, Asia and Africa to fight for liberation and freedom. The message of the film is that resistance is the only alternative to death.

The concept and the products of Third Cinema spread throughout Latin America, with Cuban filmmaker Julio García Espinosa and Brazilian director Glauber Rocha penning powerful early manifestos in the late 1960s. Aimed at domestic audiences, but also at Hollywood and Europe, these declared that 'there can be no "impartial" or "uncommitted" art, there can be no new and genuine qualitative jump in art, unless the concept and the reality of the "elite" is done away with once and for all' (Espinosa 1969, n.p.). More than a counter cinema (although stylistically informed by experimental filmmaking in Europe), the call was for a political practice challenging the hierarchy of historical change.

Returning, then, to Jameson's repeated usage of the term 'Third World', there are two points to consider. Firstly, although he was fully aware of the Third Cinema movement, he continued to apply the term Third World (and later Second World, to refer to the former states of the Warsaw Pact) to both literature and film from outside North America and Europe from his position as a First World intellectual. Secondly, his characterisation of Third World literature and film became part of a dialogue at a time when postcolonial study was in the ascendant in European and North American comparative literature departments. Jameson defends his choice of Third World as 'descriptive', arguing that it best articulates the 'fundamental breaks' between capitalist, socialist, colonial, post-colonial and imperial countries (1986b, 67). The authors of the manifestos of Third Cinema would disagree. His is a global view of late capitalism, and as such, the Third World is seen, in a temporal and economic assessment, to lag behind the First World.¹⁴ His regard for the documentary filmmakers of Third Cinema is apparent, but it is not their work or their struggle that forms the basis of his

¹⁴ Indeed Marx's own historical sequence of slave – feudal – capitalist – socialist modes of production is also Eurocentric in its idea of what counts as 'progress'.

investigation. His analysis maps the uneven spread of capital, and his interest in the marginal and the oppressed is due to the 'authenticity' of production that he sees in these societies. The traces of labour, of artistic intent and 'essence' that Jameson perceived in van Gogh's shoes are marks that signify a community that has not been reified to the point of pastiche:

The only authentic cultural production today has seemed to be that which can draw on the collective experience of marginal pockets of the social life of the world system: black literature and blues, British working-class rock, women's literature, gay literature, the roman québécois, the literature of the Third World; and this production is possible only to the degree to which these forms of collective life or collective solidarity have not yet been fully penetrated by the market and by the commodity system. ([1979] 2007, 31)

Rather than ignore the diversity of the term, he agrees that the concept of a Third World is reductive given the enormous variety of nationalities, styles, political perspectives, histories, but finds it difficult to replace. He does, however, recognise a greater diversity within the category, breaking it down into three strata: tribal or archaic cultures mixed with capitalism, such as those in Africa; imperial systems such as those in China or India; and finally the cultural hybridity of Latin America, where, due to a much earlier response to colonial power, the symbols of ancient religions and arts have twice been 'radically transformed' (1987, 155) for revolutionary purposes. As is well documented in the responses to neo-colonialism in Latin American films of the late 1960s the continent's short-lived independence was soon replaced with a second colonialism determined by the regulatory power of new governments enslaved to the 'progress' and consumerism of First World capitalism. Latin American art, therefore, has undergone two radical transformations: the first the syncretic, neo-baroque that was superimposed onto indigenous cultures by the Spanish, French and Portuguese; and the second a blending of ancient and modern cultures (such as in the paintings of Wifredo Lam or muralist Diego Rivera, and the films of Solanas, Getino, and Rocha). The 'double historical perspective' (1987, 155) that Jameson assigns to the region (he does not specify the exact geographical coordinates) is connected to Carpentier's description of syncretism and hybridity in Latin American culture. The permeation of First World capital into the 'Third World' and the subsequent influence on the production of art reveals the

‘coexistence of realities from radically different moments of history’ (1992, 307) distinct from postmodern pastiche.

Jameson tends to essentialise cultures other than his own and his generalisations smack of the exoticising of Latin America that Breton’s surrealist circle was accused of, risking the reinforcement of the stereotype of Third World culture as ‘primitive’ – a world of the historic past as opposed to the present. In ‘Third World Literature’, he argues that all third world texts are allegories of the collective, and that they differ *fundamentally* from narratives in the First World that prioritise the individual. This reductive view of First World literature, in which the public and private are ‘radically split’, is opposed to Third World texts of which he argues: ‘even those narratives which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic, necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public’ (1987, 142). He continues by suggesting that the intellectual in the Third World is ‘always in one way or another a political intellectual’ (1986b, 74).

Unsurprisingly the criticism of Jameson’s perceived generalisations reverberated for some time¹⁵, but in his defence I would argue that the enormity of his project – to understand the global impact of capitalism on culture, on politics, on economics and on art – necessarily leads to generalisations; and that, moreover, he is for the most part careful to admit his own shortcomings in regard to this. For example, he offers plenty of reminders in ‘Third World Literature’ to indicate the ‘provisional’ status of his examination of ‘neglected’ literatures (1986b, 68) and cautions the reader that North American ideology is not uniform (although perhaps not as often as he should). As Neil Lazarus points out, it is important to understand that Jameson is often speaking at a distance, hypothesising what American viewers, or American academics might think, or how American films might be characterised, rather than stating his own beliefs. Despite the generalisations, his ideas have contributed to the call for a greater critical engagement with Latin American, Asian, African art, literature and film.

¹⁵ For some, such as Aijaz Ahmed, who responded to ‘Third World Literature’ in “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the “National Allegory”, *Social Text*, 17 1987, 3-26, Jameson was a ‘civilizational Other’ who precisely exemplifying the language and attitude of the coloniser.

His was an important voice in the late 1980s, when the novels of Gabriel García Márquez and Carlos Fuentes were beginning to inform literary fiction on a global scale. Moreover, the manifestos of Third Cinema had 'fused a number of European, Soviet and Latin American ideas about cultural practice into a new, more powerful [...] programme for the political practice of cinema' (Willemen 1989, 5) and Jameson had started to direct these back at postmodern culture. What came next, his foray into the mode of magic realism, is a small yet significant area of his work that is too often overlooked in literary studies and insufficiently explored in film scholarship.

In texts such as 'Third World Literature' or 'Postmodernism and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' Jameson's readings of films, paintings, or novels seem to border on an as yet undiscovered alternative that straddles the inconsistencies and contradictions manifested in attempts to define cultural shifts that parallel the acceleration of capital. In 'On magic realism in film' (1986) and 'Soviet magic realism' (1992) this alternative is given a name: magical realism. In these two texts, analyses of the hybrid contexts and forms of Jameson's definitions of Third and Second World cinema offer new perspectives and reveal a greater complexity in the cultural shift from modernism to postmodernism. He answers his critics by choosing not to base his theorisation on revolutionary documentaries and *cinema novo*, but on a series of films that tread the boundaries of fiction and documentary, and of modern and postmodern culture, not quite falling tidily into any one categorisation (thus not the politicised Third Cinema, but the geographic Third *World* cinema).

The films Jameson discusses as cinematic magic realism are not the revolutionary works made during the final decades of the twentieth century; however they do feature social resistance, colonisation (geographical and corporeal), defamiliarisation of the quotidian and transformation. They may not be *overtly* political but they adhere to a number of features of Third Cinema, most notably historical fact; a 'documentary-style' use of monochrome or sepia tinted film; a lower budget (or the simulation of a low-budget aesthetic); challenge to mainstream marketing or content (in an anti-capitalist stance); and the foregrounding of social or cultural dissent.

The political context of marginalised cultures has been a staple of literary criticism in magic realism studies: 'Magical realism['s] program is not centralizing but eccentric: it creates space for interactions of diversity. In magical realist texts, ontological disruption serves the purpose of political and cultural disruption' (Zamora and Faris 1995, 3). Certainly some of these ideas originate in Jameson's theorisation of a cinematic mode characterised by unresolved tension and human metamorphosis; myths, phantoms, dreams and political contexts; hybrid races and ethnic diversity; and lastly, the simultaneous layering of past, present and future temporalities. However, Jameson's theoretical methodology is more expansive than critics have argued, and in addition to being an 'anthropological' mode, his cinematic magic realism explores a new *visual* aesthetic.

v. 'Perforated history' versus nostalgia

In Holland, Norden and Penzo's films, it is significant to Jameson that the historical past depicted is an ancient one (i.e. not the recent past as recycled in a postmodern pastiche), and that the information pertaining to this past is somehow incomplete or vague. This results in what he calls a history with gaps, or a 'perforated history' (1986a, 303), although any fictionalisation and/or gaps may not be immediately apparent or important to the viewer. In his essay 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture', Jameson repeatedly bemoans the commodification of the historical, or the 'cult of the glossy image' (1979, 116) that he sees in a selection of Hollywood films from the late twentieth century. He argues that Nature (his capitalisation) in the postmodern age is gone for good and the human subject can only now touch it through 'some ultimate packaging ...in cellophane' (1979, 117). He applies the words - gloss, cellophane, and packaging - to a certain kind of film in which 'an imaginary style of a real past' (117) is manufactured in a nostalgically 'indulgent' manner. Films that Jameson has cited as fitting the 'nostalgia' label include Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* parts I and II (1972; 1974); Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975); George Lucas' *American Graffiti* (1973); and Lawrence Kasdan's *Body Heat* (1981), a slick Hollywood re-make of Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944). These are all examples in which a specific historical past is revised and presented superficially through easily recognisable stereotypes (the mafiosi in *The Godfather* for

example). A film such as *American Graffiti* serves nostalgia in the form of lost, idealised teenage youth culture in the 1950s: the 'generation' film. But unlike Hartlaub's view of the 'generation', Jameson's is of a shifting category that both reflects and revises the social and cultural past. Nostalgia film presents the concept of the generation for consumption as a popularised commodity based on easily recognisable stereotypes.

The general thrust of Jameson's argument is that multinational capital encourages the production of cultural forms that have lost critical effectivity and instead recycle seemingly endless versions of glamourised and imagined retro scenes, complete with product placement. The gloss refers not only to the reflective skin of the screen, or the idealised past, but also to the complete business package of the American film industry and, by extension, most mainstream productions. The pseudo-historical depth of the postmodern 'genre' verges on kitsch, plundering cityscapes, fashions and decor from the recent past. T.J. Clark defines kitsch as 'an art and a culture of instant assimilation, of abject reconciliation to the everyday, of avoidance of difficulty' (1982, 147), but his definition refers to a love of populist sentimentality that modernism reacted against. Jameson's take on kitsch, however, is resolutely *postmodern*, employing the term to define that which is garish, depthless, and reified.

However, even though Jameson attempts to establish modernism, and later postmodernism, as distinct cultural 'stages', it is clear that no clear periodisation or hypothesis presides; each is essentially a hybrid movement, albeit with differing influences. In his discussion of modernism as an ideology in 'Beyond the Cave', he affirms a wide and varied movement that is fantastic, archaic, and futuristic and within which artists appropriate allegory, symbolism, metonymy, and abstraction to recode exterior and interior worlds. Modernist literature can range, he says, from Franz Kafka's¹⁶ *The Castle* (1926) – a novel on such modernist themes as isolation, the unconscious mind, and the socio-political conflicts of capitalism - to the much later work, *The Exorcist* (he does not specify as to whether he means William Peter Blatty's novel, 1971, or its 1973 film adaptation directed by William Friedkin), a popular American narrative of the

¹⁶ Kafka can be understood as a proto-modernist or modernist, he can even be characterised, as some have suggested, as a proto-magic realist (Flores, 1955; Durix, 1998; Shroeder, 2004).

paranormal and the role of faith in everyday life (1975). With his citation of Kafka and Blatty/Friedkin in the same breath, it becomes clear that these are by no means monolithic descriptions; he conceives of such texts and films as being diverse and hybrid. *The Exorcist* resides in the popular imagination as an example of the postmodern cult of 'body horror'¹⁷ and as a paranoid re-envisioning of contemporary America. However, *The Exorcist* also represents traces of past social systems that are arguably rooted in both the modern and pre-modern eras. Significantly, it begins at an archaeological dig in which Roman Catholic relics are excavated along with the remains of a demonic totem. The connection between these juxtaposed artefacts (representing Catholicism and a satanic paganism), and later between a priest doubting his faith and the possession of a young girl, reveals an American society still in the grip of pre-modern superstition. The belief in possession and the ancient power of the Catholic Church, it would seem, can never be fully cancelled. It will return again in another form.

Jameson's answer as to how such overlapping histories and ideologies can be accounted for employs a Marxist explanation: 'Only Marxism,' he argues, 'can give us an adequate account of the essential *mystery* of the cultural past. These matters can recover their original urgency for us only if they are retold within the unity of a single great collective story, only if they are grasped as vital episodes in a single vast unfinished plot' (1981, 19). A collective historical past includes the narrative of class struggle, the tales of oppressors and of the oppressed, and forms what he terms a 'political unconscious' – the repressed and buried histories that continue to influence and affect the present. There are certainly changes and shifts, but it is difficult to identify clear epistemic breaks. His use of the words 'mystery' and 'vital episode' in this passage are tied both to Marxist and to psychoanalytic discourses on the role of objects, on the function of desire, on aesthetics and primitivism. They are also central terms in his lexicon of magic realism, and key interventions in his theorisation of art in late capitalism.

¹⁷ For an account of 'body horror' in films of the late 1970s and early 1980s, see Philip Brophy's 'Horrority: the textuality of contemporary horror films', which marked the beginnings of a new sub-genre in which social fear was explored through images of excessive bodies that although monstrous, nevertheless corresponded to very real human paranoias (Brophy 2000, 276-284).

Cinematic magic realism is set in opposition to the nostalgia film because Jameson believes that the mode of magic realism politicises the past instead of turning it into postmodern simulacra. In 'On magic realism' for example, Jameson insists that Norden's portrayal of early twentieth century Colombia differs from contemporaneous American films in which violence is glamourised:

In Condores we are closest to the stylistic or generic seam that separates magic realism from nostalgia film [...] The mint and shiny antiquity of the gangsters' limousine [...] clearly functions as the two-fold and now conventional nostalgia-film signal of a specific historical (or, more properly, generational) period and of a specific generic paradigm (in this case, gangster or Mafia film) of which the postmodernist version will stand as a pastiche. Such initial nostalgia-film dynamics will, however, be subverted in various ways as the film develops: this element in particular is wholly transformed by its recurrence at the end of the movie, in which (against all expectation) the Condor is finally killed in an empty small town street at night (1986a, 309).

While Jameson's assessment of a First World, largely American, cinematic production of generational stereotypes is not without problems, this citation clearly illustrates why he believes magic realism to be an alternative to postmodern pastiche. These films' 'authentic' portrayal of life at the margins challenges the dominant social and economic hierarchies embedded in capitalist world culture:

The only authentic cultural production today has seemed to be that which can draw on the collective experience of marginal pockets of the social life of the world system; [...] and this production is possible only to the degree to which these forms of collective life or collective solidarity have not yet been fully penetrated by the market and by the commodity system (1979, 31).

vi. 'Believable' history: cinematic magic realism and the body of the common victim

As Holland's *Fever* commences (the film with which Jameson first identifies magic realism), the audience is immediately plunged into a dull brown and grey vision of Poland, which, the intertitle makes explicit, is under the violent Russian military occupation of 1905 to 1907. The intertitle also informs us that the group of young men we see are the 'heroes' of an active revolutionary party. The intertitle is a device common to the 'storytelling' structure of cinematic magic

realism (a link to its literary heritage), but its authority here is undermined due to the minimal information imparted (contributing to Jameson's 'gaps'). Nevertheless, the version of history depicted in *Fever* is neither a parody nor a form of pastiche; it uncovers a fundamental ideological problem – failed Socialism, in this case. In the introduction I introduced the sub-genre of Polish cinematic magic realism as developed by Mazierska and Klonowska. They describe a mode of cinema in which a nostalgic vision of rural Poland 'seemingly outside time' (Klonowska, 189) is imbued with the supernatural. Neither critic mentions *Fever* as an example of magic realism, and indeed Jameson's analysis of the film, contrastively, emphasises its violent and excessive portrayal of a band of revolutionaries living within the confines of a totalitarian-ruled rural community.

Holland's depiction of early twentieth century Poland is devoid of nostalgia, and, as we shall see, its magic derives not from supernatural intervention, but from the transformation of the real through the disruption of the narrative. A series of objects contribute to a defamiliarisation of the history being reimagined on screen that Jameson finds uncanny. Shot in close-up, sometimes out of context and therefore not immediately reconcilable to the plot, these unforgettable objects seem to Jameson excessive against the dull and dimly lit scenes in which the revolution is plotted. Moreover, due to the levels of madness and paranoia, 'fever', which increase throughout the film, the narrative follows the trans-temporal flux of thought, and Holland highlights points of desperation experienced by individual characters against the backdrop of historic conflict. The version of 'history' that Holland reveals is emotional, fraught, and violent, driven by a tense counterpoint between objects and paranoid victims of the regime. Although this produces an alienating effect which contributes to a 'perforated' sense of history, it should be noted that Holland's film is still very much driven by plot, by continuity editing rather than associative montage, and the story was designed to have an unveiled political message¹⁸. *Fever*'s somewhat contradictory status, then, rests upon a tension between classical narrative and the stylistic influence of what Drummond (see page 28) referred to as 'internal

¹⁸ Due to the coincidence of its release with the birth of the Polish Solidarity movement in 1980, it has largely been interpreted as a commentary on (then) contemporary politics. In 1984, while promoting the film in Chicago, Holland 'commented that the similarity of the film's subject matter and the Solidarity movement, which at that time was banned by Poland's communist authorities, rendered her film unwelcome in Poland' (Gessner 2000)

vanguards'. Jameson's 'perforated history' describes the cinematic re-telling of a real historical past interrupted by ellipses, augmentations, chronological re-ordering, and 'vital episodes' that correspond to a subjective, interior reality.

In literary magic realism chronicles and stories are woven into a narrative that refuses to order past, present and future. Often mythical subjects and historical archetypes lend a sense of infinite or eternal repetition, whereby the past continually returns to haunt the living. In Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo* the haunting is both fantasy (the 'ghost' of Henri Christophe) and a form of historical repetition (the generations of colonial power, the punishment for insubordination). The stories brought to life in Holland, Penzo and Norden's films focus on human transformation instigated through political action, with the only ghostly presence that of the colonial past. Jameson's description of the *political unconscious* takes visual form in cinematic magic realism, as images of historicised human suffering converging in the diegetic present. This is presented through key objects that emerge from landscapes and cityscapes that have been made to seem strangely familiar. Eschewing the pseudo-historical depth of the postmodern nostalgia film, Jameson's mode of cinematic magic realism reflects on the changing modes of production in a given region or community, revealing how they become 'locked into' struggles between past and present: each community or group finds that they are in conflict with what has gone before, and each individual battles with their inner demons.

In Penzo's *La Casa de Agua*, the central conceit is the inverted metaphor of water as the force of death. The protagonist, Cruz Elías León gives up his place at university in order to fight against the social injustices of the ruling military, and becomes involved in the opposition. The film opens and closes with scenes of Cruz being tortured, his head and torso repeatedly plunged into icy water, juxtaposed with shots of his funeral procession – a slow black flow of attendants following his coffin. Penzo emphasises the opposing forces of *agua*, by contrasting scenes of Cruz's idealised childhood home by the sea in Cumaná, with images of terror connected to the water torture and the watery wheeze of tuberculosis in his congested lungs. Penzo draws attention to natural elements in order to show how history is being played out upon them. The bleached white expanse of the Venezuelan salt flats becomes blank pages onto which the bodies

of the dying and the dead fall. Oppositionists are shot or hung up to die on makeshift versions of Christ's cross, their corpses marking a collective historical imprint on the land. These scenes are juxtaposed with the 'real' history of intercut newsreel footage. Encapsulated in these real and fictionalised representations of history are centuries of references to the colonial past and, in the flashes of contemporary news footage, the efforts of the Roosevelt government to challenge European oil drilling in the area. Jameson suggests that in the magic realist film everything rests on 'the body of the common victim' (1986a, 325) with the violence wrought upon it telling the story of a collective, social history. He argues that this re-telling, or re-imagining, of violence prevents the waning of affect by interrupting the narrative, thereby producing a 'gap' or an 'excess' of meaning that diverts the spectator. Nostalgia is thus replaced by a more interactive, subjective version of history that requires a greater intensity of reaction in the spectator.

vii. Violence and libidinal affect: the French Post-Structuralist Influence

The concept of overlapping and layering, of non-synchronized temporality, in Jameson's writing is as heavily influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis as it is by Marxist philosophy. This inter-theoretical weaving of Marxist and psychoanalytic thought is, as he often acknowledges, the subject of much consternation and disagreement among the French Post-Structuralists. Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Jean-Francois Lyotard for example, whose texts form a counterpoint to Jameson's own, and which he cites frequently, are also inspired by a materialist reading of Freudian desire and wish-fulfilment. Their writing abounds with psychoanalytic terms for social and cultural problems: disease, libidinal intensity, the unconscious, schizophrenia, fetishism, hysteria and repression. Their respective interpretations each raise very different questions, with their symbiotically psychodynamic and material approaches to social history each differing in emphasis. In 'On magic realism' Jameson's political unconscious, which is found to resurface at vital and poignant moments in the present, is also discussed in relation to the libidinal, or an ever-present violent and unpredictable desire.

Deleuze and Guattari's 1974 text *Anti-Oedipus* puts forward 'schizoanalysis', or 'materialist psychiatry' as an alternative to Freudian psychoanalysis, in which the

processes of desire as a *social* code are asserted over the unconscious dynamics of the Oedipal triangle: 'We maintain that the social field is immediately invested by desire, that it is the historically determined product of desire, and that libido has no need of any mediation or sublimation, any psychic operation, any transformation, in order to invade and invest the productive forces and the relations of production. *There is only desire and the social, and nothing else*' (2004, 31, original emphasis). Lyotard claims that desire runs beneath every capitalist process: 'Every political economy is libidinal' (2004, 107); and Deleuze and Guattari argue in their anti-oedipal analysis of desire that 'the most general principle of schizoanalysis is that desire is always constitutive of a social field' (2011, 381).

In 'On magic realism', Jameson invokes Lyotard's *Economie libidinal* [Libidinal Economy, 1974], which argues that desire supports the underlying structure of capitalism. Lyotard builds his thesis on the proposal that human desire is transformed into 'intensities' that achieve a material status 'characterized by their displaceability, their instantaneity and their resistance to the temporal syntheses of memory' (Hamilton Grant 2004, xiv). Jameson appropriates Lyotard's 'libidinal apparatus' for his own theory of the mechanics of social fantasy as 'an empty form or structural matrix in which a charge of free-floating and inchoate fantasy - both ideological and psychoanalytic - can suddenly crystallize, and find the articulated figuration essential for its social actuality and psychic effectivity' (1981b, 11). In the films discussed by Jameson in 'On magic realism' the crystallisation of free-floating fantasy generated by the filmmakers, the diegetic characters, and the spectator, is released in the form of 'vital episodes'. For Jameson, it is the eruption of violent interludes that illustrate a deep-rooted desire for social change, or perform the anguish and suffering of social oppression.

Glauber Rocha's manifesto for Brazilian Cinema Novo declares that revolutionary uprising is not the behaviour of 'primitivism' but an 'aesthetic of violence' (1965, n.p.). Jameson argues that without exception, magic realism's affect¹⁹ is characterised by a violence that is performed or implied (whether

¹⁹ Here Jameson's use of the term affect refers to an emotional response, a libidinal intensity.

directly or associatively), via a momentary shock, or the gradual spread of social oppression and paranoia whereby the ideology of a regime is enforced. In each there is a transformation of ideas into violent images (torture, assassination, burned and disease-ridden bodies), largely imagined in the presentation of objects rather than through individual characters, and where character is emphasised, the films typically focus on the corporeal. Hopes, utopian visions and repressed memories are figuratively conceived as objects: a bomb, flames, diseased bodies, a make-shift psychiatric hospital, a fountain of water, a funeral procession, and particles of dust.

In each of these three films, the protagonists die a violent death, their bodies unceremoniously dumped and forgotten, recalling the cruel irony of Buñuel's *Los olvidados* (Mexico, 1950) in which the bodies of young delinquents pile up on the rubbish heaps of Mexico City's slums. This human detritus signifies the common victim of a violent and unrelenting social modernisation. Solanas speaks of living in 'a world where the unreal rules' and desire can only result in a fleeting satisfaction (1969, np); the protagonists in these films inhabit the gap between desire and satisfaction. Eruptions of violence mark the point at which the two converge.

Lyotard understands violence to be an eruption of 'intensity' released through revolutionary activity. Despite the enslavement to the machine and to commodity culture that he associates with hegemonic capitalism, he also suggests that workers experience a form of *jouissance* within their oppression that is released in violent bursts. In Lyotard's account, libidinal intensities are marked by their 'uncontainability' by the dominant discourse (1974). The 'hysterical madness' of modern labour conditions can be transformed by the workers into an ecstatic release, a release that is particularly vivid in periods of revolutionary activity. This fits Jameson's description of an *intensification* of 'excised' temporality, a revelling in a moment of transformation that simultaneously tells of past histories and the 'tradition of "terrorism"' (1986a, 303). Cinematic magic realism turns on the fleeting sense of unreality at the heart of a violent capitalist culture.

Direct action reveals anxieties embedded in the contradictory desires - the pleasure and displeasure - of capitalist culture. These films dwell on the 'peculiar

pleasure' (303) of late capitalism of which commodity fetishism, the effacement of the human from production, the violent clashes between dominant and minority groups and the utopian desire for change are all a part (303). In Holland, Norden and Penzo's films, the political outcast, regardless of his or her ideological persuasion (Léon Maria in *Condores* is a right-wing extremist despised by the liberal majority), acts in opposition to the hegemony thereby isolating him or herself. In each case, this opposition brings social and economic instability. In *Fever* the sole female revolutionary, Kama, is verbally abused, raped, and finally ends the film tied to a bed in an institution for the insane. Our last glimpse of her is of a tortured face, contorted into a scream, and even though she makes no sound, the image is excessive in its bloodcurdling violence. In *Condores* and *La Casa de Agua*, human bodies become spectacles – the objects of sustained violation - but Jameson seems to be offering them as examples of a different kind of spectacle. In *The Political Unconscious* he cites Guy Debord's argument that the society of the spectacle 'needs to be radically historicized' (1981, 11). In each of these films a version of history is held up to the bodies of its victims. Jameson continually asserts that readings of the past are dependent on the present, and cinematic magic realism visualises the negative dialectics of the society of the spectacle through this bodily suffering.

viii. Defining affect: van Gogh, Warhol and the evocative correspondence between object and viewer

In cinematic magic realism 'authentic' historical events do not have the monochrome contrasts that gives documentary photography its 'realism', but neither are they presented in the 'full-color achievements of Hollywood' (1992, 101). Indeed, one can say that the dullness of the Polish earth, the interiors of Venezuelan public buildings, and Colombian small-town asphalt, are the antithesis of the 'elegant gleam of clean glass', which Jameson uses to describe the nostalgia film (1986a, 312). Each of the diegetic representations that he pronounces magic realist remains reasonably faithful to customs, costumes, décor, and events that are known to have existed during the era that they represent. At no point did I, for example, completely lose consciousness of these connections to a real historical background. However, each of the filmmakers makes the decision to depict Poland, Colombia, and Venezuela as faded worlds

which have been given a strange and unusual patina that works against the grain of realism. Strangeness is conveyed through colour: not a coded or symbolic usage of colour, but a desaturated colour palette of 'chemical combinations' (305) in which dull yellows, dark greens, browns and greys tend to predominate but are sometimes 'interrupted' by unexpected flashes of colour. The deliberate 'imperfection' of the colour image creates, as discussed above, an aesthetic affect that reminds Jameson of Third Cinema, simulating a low-budget aesthetic. The manipulation of the image in these cases draws attention to the film as fiction. These films are not reportage documents, nor do they claim to be documentaries, yet neither do they offer the illusory effect of reality characteristic of classical narrative cinema. Jameson rightly identifies moments of disruption and gaps in information, but I would go further to tie this discussion to a wider critical discussion of fictionality in film in order to better explain his formal dichotomy of 'glossy' image versus 'desaturated' image.

In his influential essay 'Detour by the Direct' (originally published in 1969), Jean-Louis Comolli argues that a documentary film is necessarily 'manipulated' by those involved in its creation: 'The more manipulation there is involved, the more firmly fiction takes hold, and the stronger the mark of the (critical/aesthetic) distance taken, which modifies the reading (and nature) of the event recorded' (Comolli 1980, 227). Penzo, Holland and Norden's films function in a comparable way, albeit at a different register of reality. The starting point for each film is a historic recounting of a real political situation, which is then manipulated through mise-en-scene, character identification, and fairly traditional plot developments based on tragedy, violence and death. In his essay, Comolli discusses how documentary film 'begins to be affected by fiction' as it becomes subject to multiple perspective, lighting, framing, sound editing and so on. 'It responds to the flight from reality with a new lease of meaning and coherence and emerges from the dialectic endowed with perhaps greater conviction, its truth reinforced by and because of this detour through the "fictitious"' (227). The films that Jameson discusses start as fictions, and are further manipulated through the application of coloured lenses so that an artificial reality effect is achieved. Comolli argues that for film, the movement between dream and reality is constant, with what he calls 'extreme reality' (227)

seeming dreamlike, and fictional worlds or mythical tales taking on a heightened reality. I use this comparison to illustrate how Jameson's reading of cinematic magic realism is based upon a similar (although more subjective) premise: what he deems magical is the two-way movement whereby social realism is invested with the human fantasies of the characters, and a compromised (incomplete) version of reality is augmented by a fake reality effect (the 'documentary' aesthetic of the desaturated colour palette.) Comolli's thesis that fiction and reality exist in a symbiotic relationship within a film is helpful in conceptualising the tension between fantasy (individual and social) and recorded history in magic realism.

In the 1984 version of 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' published in the *New Left Review*, Jameson distinguishes between modernism and postmodernism by measuring the affect generated by cultural objects. The art object becomes the focaliser through which he considers capitalist patterns and practices on a global scale. This dialectical practice is inspired specifically by 'The stress Marx laid on individual works of art and the value they had for him' (1974, xi). It is therefore unsurprising that cinematic magic realism, as an alternative to the 'glossy' surfaces of the postmodern nostalgia film, should be partially defined according to the amount of affect it produces. The art object is seen to serve as an 'experimental or laboratory situation', a microcosm through which theoretical and philosophical ideas can be tested. In Jameson demonstrates how, in certain works of art canonical legacies, historical discourse or 'origins' persist, but wane in others, by comparing two works of art: van Gogh's painting *A Pair of Shoes*, (1886), (which Jameson refers to as 'Peasant Shoes') and Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* (1980)²⁰.

²⁰ This is a reviewed version which expands upon his analysis of van Gogh, Warhol, and Munch in the earlier 'Postmodernism and Consumer Culture', 1983.



Figure 37: Vincent van Gogh, *A Pair of Shoes*, 1887, oil on canvas, 37.5x45 cm, The Baltimore Museum of Art: The Cone Collection, Maryland



Figure 38: Andy Warhol, *Diamond Dust Shoes*, 1980, synthetic polymer and silkscreen inks on canvas with diamond dust, 177.8 x 228, Private Collection

Van Gogh's footwear, variously described as boots or shoes, has received significant critical attention, from Martin Heidegger's hermeneutic reading in 'The Origin of the World of Art' (originally published in 1950), through art historian Meyer Shapiro's argument in which he argues that the boots in question are van Gogh's own²¹, to Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of the differences in Heidegger and Shapiro's respective interpretations that also introduces a gendered reading of the painting.²² Jameson deems van Gogh's

²¹ In Shapiro's 1968 notes on the painting in response to Heidegger, he asserts that the shoes were drawn as an emotional response to a particular pair that van Gogh wore as a Christian missionary on a trip to Belgium that remind him of arduous days spent walking, preaching to miners in the Borinage coal mine and nursing an injured miner. Shapiro argues that Heidegger completely misses van Gogh's personal investment in the painting. Ultimately, Shapiro's reading finds that not only are the shoes instruments of a worker, but that they also convey an inner life: the trauma and anxiety of van Gogh's social existence. See Shapiro, 1968, 140.

²² To complicate matters, van Gogh painted a series of shoes, yet Jameson does not differentiate between the various versions. In the introduction to *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late*

painting modernist in its expressive quality: 'the willed and violent transformation of a drab peasant object world' (1984a, 59). Despite its extensive reproduction, the image is claimed to resist becoming an 'inert object' or a reified fetish. Following Heidegger's argument, (to which he largely adheres throughout) Jameson maintains that the image reveals an original 'situation' which conveys a historical context to the viewer (1984a, 58). To 'resist' assimilation into the fragmented cacophony of postmodern culture, the 'modernist' work of art must foreground its origins, either directly, or associatively. Jameson's reference to the 'origin' of the painting is clearly concerned with a historical origin, but it is also clearly influenced by Heidegger's theory that every object has an *essence*, that makes up its *being*, and the work of art does not reproduce a likeness from something actual, but according to Heidegger 'on the contrary [reproduces] things' general essence' (2010, 134), part of which is originated by human sensory perception: 'In what the sense of sight, hearing, and touch convey in the sensations of color, sound, roughness, hardness, things move us bodily, in the literal meaning of the word' (Heidegger 1978, 156). The painting is either felt in a 'present' moment in time or, it is predicated on memory and experience and the sensations are bound to the relationship of people to things, and of things to the work of art. Jameson argues that the pathos created by van Gogh's painting springs from the evocative correspondence between the viewer, the artist and layers of recent and ancient pasts.

Jameson believes that the modernist work can 'compensate' for the processes of commodification by presenting a 'semi-autonomous space in its own right', which acts as an alternative reality, a message of hope (1984a, 59). Secondly, the shoes become a clue or suggestion for a wider reality, an 'expressive' symbol of 'the whole missing object-world'²³ (1984a, 59), of the wintery fields, the grain, the earth and the labour associated with it. The shoes are an important link

Capitalism, (1991) the reproduction of *The Pair of Boots* is from the original in The Baltimore Museum of Art. This differs from the version seen in 1930 by Heidegger at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. In his analysis he refers to Heidegger's descriptions of the ochre fields, which are clearly absent from this blue-hued version of the painting.

²³ The term 'object-world' is used in Marxist and psychoanalytic theory to refer to objects in the exterior world outside ourselves. For Heidegger the object-world means 'being-in-the-world', each object has a place and an essence. In Jameson's postmodernism, the object-world becomes fragmented in the accelerated exchange and reproduction of objects that have become detached from their 'essence' or meaning.

between the implied object-world, an imagined subject (owner) of the shoes, and her labour, which is implied by what they refer to as a 'vibrating' (Heidegger) 'revelation' (Jameson) of a desolated peasant working environment. Combined, these two aspects (the work of art as a clue to a wider reality and the idealistic or Utopian²⁴ impulse) confirm to Jameson that there can be a satisfactory exchange of one material object for another without losing affect through reproduction.

In addition to *A Pair of Shoes*, Jameson also mentions Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893), as 'a canonical expression for the great modernist thematic of alienation, anomie, solitude and social fragmentation [...] even more modernistic due to its virtual deconstruction of the very aesthetic of expression itself' (1984a, 61). The suffering and anxiety suggested in *The Scream* assist Jameson in his project, which is to illustrate how affect and 'cultural pathology' (63) have been replaced by the complete fragmentation and depthless emotion of postmodern works of art. I believe that there are two reasons as to why he chose to focus on van Gogh's painting rather than Munch's here. Firstly, to maintain the link to footwear; and secondly because his painting invokes more intensely the conditions of labour and the rapid colonisation of nature in the machine age, whereas Munch's expressionistic scream speaks more of the individual's response to what nature had become – an abstracted metaphor for the human mind. Artistic modernism is considered in many ways to have represented the alienation, suffering, and pathos of everyday life in the early twentieth century and is thus part of a realist discourse. On the other hand, deliberate abstractions of form underscore the materiality of the medium, and the deployment of strange objects and perspectives emphasise the work of art as artifice. Jameson's reading of modernism, of the constant flow of a *political unconscious*, differs from the more

²⁴ Jameson's definition of Utopia is intrinsic to his analysis of the production of art. It reflects the belief in alternative worlds, and alternative social structures that occupied a prominent place at the heart of much modernist discourse (*magischer realismus* and Surrealism being examples of this). For Jameson, modernist art demonstrates a painful awareness of what has gone before (and therefore what is now lacking) but in its critical stance also looks to a future of accelerated commodification for which it attempts to deliver an alternative: 'The increasing abstraction of visual art thus proves not only to express the abstraction of daily life and to presuppose fragmentation and reification; it also constitutes a Utopian compensation for everything lost in the process of the development of capitalism' (1981, 236). According to this analysis, modernism necessarily involves the creation of an alternative world, or system, in which the dominant hegemony is overthrown, or challenged. The projection-fantasy of what *could be* casts a new light on the present.

artist-centred or avant-garde-based accounts of modernism discussed in earlier chapters in which specific dates and manifestos shape the terrain. However, it should be remembered that Roh and Hartlaub also note the cancellation and reinvention of artistic movements in their ‘manifestos’ for *magischer realismus* and New Objectivity: ‘Every tendency is tied to a generation, fades along with it into the background, and becomes outmoded in order perhaps to reappear later under a new aspect’ (Hartlaub 1994, 492). Despite their desire to distinguish ‘new’ art from Expressionism, neither man believed Expressionism to be dead. Jameson seems to want to hold onto the ‘pathos’ in modernist Expressionism in order to prevent the waning of affect that he sees in postmodern culture. Yet, as we shall see, he is unable to clearly demarcate the boundaries between these two cultural periodisations and their objects.

ix. Postmodernism and the ‘waning of affect’

In 1984 Jameson wrote the foreword to the English translation of Jean-Francois Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* (originally published in 1979). Here, the principle differences between Lyotard’s definition of postmodernism and his own are clearly displayed, and the kernel of an idea that becomes assimilated into his definition of magic realism can be detected [see appendix iv-1].

Jameson’s view of postmodernism is principally directed at the ‘waning of affect’ (1984a; 1986; 1991) in the advanced stages of late capitalism. This physical and psychological attenuation is attributed to the power of reification to erode ‘our cognitive relationship with the social totality’ (1977, 978), as evidenced in the commodification of the human form in the visual arts. The reification concurrent with the emergence of modernism is argued to reach a point at which relations between people and things, between things and their history or meaning, become depersonalised and ‘depthless’. Modernism, rather than being at the point of return as Lyotard would have it, has been assimilated by the dominant logic of postmodernism into which every object and movement is thrown; and in which the ‘erosion’ of ‘older distinctions’ between high and mass or popular culture adds to this free-floating culture. The loss of affect results from the twin disappearance of ‘interpretative depth’, in which the object is apprehended historically or hermeneutically; and ‘psychological depth’ in which ‘a particular phenomenological or emotional reaction to the world disappears’

(1989, 4). The subjective experience and the anxiety he finds in modernist art has been transformed into a cultural logic of 'discontinuous' relations, of interactions between surfaces that can no longer be apprehended in the same way. The human subject, he argues, has been dissolved into the 'decentred' culture (1989, 6-7).

Having set up van Gogh's shoes as a model of an expressive modernist work, Jameson proceeds to attempt an illustration of its antithesis in Andy Warhol's 'postmodern' silkscreened painting series *Diamond Dust Shoes* (1980), chosen for its flat, depthless, and superficial qualities. Warhol's series portrays groups of high-heeled shoes in colour and black and white, their surfaces encrusted with a pulverised diamonté dust, and in this *New Left Review* article of 1984, Jameson concentrates in particular on one of the monochrome examples. Gone for him is the space for a hermeneutic reading: 'Nothing in this painting organizes even a minimal place for the viewer'; and gone also is the notion that a work of art communicates an idea: 'it no longer speaks to us with any of the immediacy of van Gogh's footgear; [...] it does not really speak to us at all' (1984a, 59). Van Gogh's vibrant shoes 'speak' to Jameson, but Warhol's group of unpaired shoes only provides signs of an interrupted and random communication – a bold claim given Warhol's deliberate steps to explain his artistic practice in television appearances, interviews and in transcribed memoirs.²⁵

Diamond Dust Shoes fails to 'communicate' according to Jameson because the shoes have become depersonalised; they remind him of the detritus left after a dance-hall fire or the piles of victims' shoes in Nazi concentration camps. Despite the pathos inscribed in these interpretations – strange in an argument for their depthlessness – Jameson nevertheless insists that the shoes inevitably signal a severing of the art work from the original subject or object that is its reference. In this postmodern condition, he argues, any number of random connections can be made: 'This is not to say that the cultural products of the postmodern era are utterly devoid of feeling, but rather that such feelings - which it may be better and more accurate to call "intensities" - are now free-floating and impersonal [...]

²⁵ See Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 2007. First published in 1975, this part memoir, part manifesto, transcribed and edited by long-time friend and colleague Pat Hackett, clearly states Warhol's intentions regarding his art and business.

' (1984a, 64). He argues, therefore, that Warhol's paintings are symptomatic of a kind of pastiche that has lost the imprint of the subject, or of any personal style related to the artist (clearly ignoring Warhol's distinctive style). For Jameson the monochrome *Diamond Dust Shoes* is a 'glacé x-ray' (1984a, 60), taking on an almost sinister aspect; the assembled shoes are ghostly apparitions devoid of human contact, the haunting repressed of a glossy magazine shoot. Their plurality merely signals repetition, unlike the affirmation of human presence he registers in van Gogh's painting; the silkscreen of a photonegative is a reproduction of a reproduction that forms part of an endless manufacture and exchange of images. The only compensation, Jameson argues, is a 'pseudo-historical depth' (1989, 20) characteristic of postmodern art forms: the uncanny return of the repressed, a ghostly reproduction of objects that were once part of the fragmented commodity exchange of the fashion industry, but without any clues to connect them to their origins.

Read as an 'x-ray', the black and white photonegative of *Diamond Dust Shoes* brings to mind the technological experiments in photography of the first half of the twentieth century. The shoes, shot from above, float in the darkness, their under and overexposed elements reversed. The processing of the image is, in fact, reminiscent of Roh's experimental photonegative prints of street scenes and female nudes that (as Roh claimed in his photobook commentary) scrutinise bodily and objective forms through the apparatus. Roh's photographs are emptied of the vitality customarily associated with light in positive prints, yet due to the translucency and reversal of light and shadow they project an 'otherworldliness', a mysterious aspect of the exterior world as expectation is reversed. Warhol's monochrome shoes seem to capture Jameson's imagination to a greater extent than the coloured versions. The ghostly black and white underscores human absence, thus suggesting a profound interaction between himself as the viewer and the painting. Indeed, Jameson's interpretation of Warhol's monochrome painting contradicts his earlier comment that it leaves no space for the viewer, because he clearly finds something affecting in the images. Despite his assertion that Warhol's shoes do not speak, Jameson seems intrigued by the way in which the photonegative appears to reverberate with the unsaid.

Moreover, the *Diamond Dust Shoes* attest to Warhol's self-reflexive practice in that they deliberately exhibit their disposability and emptied exchange value ironically, actually fitting Jameson's earlier definition of modernism's employment of a radical technicality to draw attention to a political or social problem. Jameson's assertion that the shoes cannot be traced back to their 'original' context has been challenged by Mandy Merck, whose analysis of Warhol's series cites a number of 'origins' for the reproduced footwear, including Warhol's earlier fashion illustrations and an intriguing list of popular cultural references that testify to his fascination with fashion, and more specifically drag fashion.²⁶ Merck concludes that Warhol's paintings invite a hermeneutic reading of their originating 'dramaturgy' (Heidegger's term) as much as van Gogh's shoes: 'I should be permitted to summon up the tackiness of a sidewalk display in the garment district' (1996, 231). Indeed, tackiness and everydayness are very much a part of Warhol's fantasy of the American dream and his aestheticization of mass production whereby rich and poor drink identically tasting Coca-Cola.

Warhol's shoes evoke nostalgia for something lost or a fantasy awaiting fulfilment that fits Jameson's theorisation of postmodern nostalgia. Yet Jameson ignores his subversion of commodity culture to assert that the paintings offer nothing of ideological value. In a later revision of this article, he surmises that *Diamond Dust Shoes* has no personal Unconscious (his capitalisation) and is Surrealism 'without its manifesto or its avant-garde' (1989, 174), despite Warhol's self-aware aesthetic pronouncements over the years. Postmodern 'intensities', he argues, are impersonal, a historicised and free-floating, whereas magic realist 'intensities' are tied to unconscious political histories. The same assertion is made by magic realist critic Theo D'Haen, who argues that a magical realist text differs from a postmodern text because of its specific 'political consciousness-raising' (1992,

²⁶ See Merck, 'Figuring Out Andy Warhol' in *Pop Out: Queer Warhol*, Doyle et al (eds.), 1999, pages 224-237; and also *Interview* journalist Bob Colacello's account of his 'Warhol years' in which the following citation sheds a significant light on the paintings: 'The *Diamond Dust Shoes* of 1980 actually started out as an advertising assignment from another staple: Halston. Victor Hugo sent down a big box of various styles to be photographed for the ad campaign of Halston's shoe licensee, Garalini. Ronnie turned the box upside down and dumped the shoes out. Andy liked the way they looked spilled all over the floor. So he took a few Polaroids and had Ronnie take a lot more. The diamond-dust idea was stolen from Rupert Smith, who had been using the industrial-grade ground-up stones on some prints of his own. He was foolish enough to tell Andy where to buy it.' (Colacello, 1999, 443)

202). Ultimately Jameson finds the critical distance in modernist art to be lacking in its postmodern equivalent; but his definition of affect is unreliable and highly subjective. In his theorisation of cinematic magic realism this remains unchanged, but clearer examples of the structure and process of affect are outlined. Before continuing, it is necessary to consider these.

x. Further definitions of affect

Attempts to theorise affect have been numerous (Spinoza, 1677, (English version, 1883); Tomkins, 1962, 1963; Deleuze and Guattari (throughout their work); Sedgwick and Frank, 1995; Massumi, 2002), and it remains a vast and contradictory field. In Part III of his five-volume *Ethics*, entitled 'On the origin and nature of the emotions' (1667), Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) defines affect as mixed emotional responses to objects and ideas in the exterior world that may or may not be conscious: 'Everyone shapes his actions according to his emotion [...] a mental decision and a bodily appetite, or determined state, are simultaneous, or rather are one and the same thing' (Spinoza, III, Prop II).

Affect is said to be comprised of both 'primal' (instinctive) and cognitive processes, yet it needs, like the structure of magic realism, some contradiction or tension to proceed. Spinoza divides affect along positive and negative lines, with joy, pleasure, and love belonging to the former, and suffering, pain, jealousy and hatred to the latter. Each emotion, or affect, is replaced and overpowered by subsequent affects in the constant metamorphosis of existence – of becoming. According to Spinoza, affect is, for the most part, structured by social influences in which certain common links between objects and emotional response exist (for example fear or hatred of an object that has been publicly constructed).

However, there is also room in his list of emotional responses for 'vacillations of spirit' or 'Wonder' (Spinoza's capitalisation), an affective state linked to things never experienced before: a 'mental modification, or imagination of a particular thing,' that is 'alone in the mind' (III, Prop LII). Imagination is described as an active, conscious process in which the subject deliberates over a set of images based on prior experience, instead of occupying the dreamy, magical realms and fantastic utopias. Jameson's use of the term affect is also based in socio-psychological readings, but it is to Freud's theories of the uncanny that he turns,

rather than to Spinoza, or Silvan Tomkins' much later theory of 'innate' primary affects.²⁷ This subject-centred analysis marks a key difference between postmodern film, in which the subject 'does not survive into postmodernity because its precondition does not – the subject was one of the first casualties of theory's assault on the received ideas of modernity' (Buchanan 2006, 93), and its magic realist counterpart. Contrastively, cinematic magic realism is deemed by Jameson to be full of affect.

More recent criticism on affect has tended towards commentary on the 'virtual' or 'unrepresentable' aspects of existence or, to put it plainly, the accumulation of affect in the relation between the living and the non-living; the affect created in the political relations between states and systems; incremental shifts in the relations between things that go beyond earlier theories of emotional resonance. Not all theories of affect are political, but most implement a structural analysis that examines transition, crisis and convergence in the relations between the subject and the socio-historical. Most famously, Deleuze's later writings on art and cinema expand the field of affect theory. His materialist theorisation of cinematic affect as a structural, dialectical process shares many of the hypotheses central to Jameson's theorisation of magic realism, in which the magical is conceived of as a structural process of deconcealment.

However, whereas Jameson connects affect to subjective and collective emotional responses leading to a potential politicisation of the image, Deleuze's film philosophy is a departure from film criticism that prioritises a psychoanalytic reading, and he conceives of affect as the 'domain of cold decision' (Flaxman 2000, 366). If we compare their respective approaches to affect in film, it is evident that Jameson's version stays with the subjective relation to the object world whereas Deleuze's virtualises both subject and object in a mechanics of thought, in which brain activity (*la vie spirituelle*) is visualised in cinematic images: 'spiritual life is the movement of the mind' (Flaxman 2000, 366). Although both investigate affect as visual traces of the interaction between things, Jameson

²⁷ For a concise discussion of affect in Tomkins' research, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank - 'Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.21, No.2, Winter 1995, pp496-522

insists, resolutely, that the intensity of affect is formed as much on the side of the subject as that of the object (“The Existence of Italy”, 1992, 256).

It is clear that while Jameson often cites Deleuze (*Cinema 1* and *The Fold* in particular) his political unconscious is rooted in a reality that incorporates marvellous and uncanny fantasies. Deleuze’s ‘affection-image’²⁸: a film image in which the ‘state of things’ in the world –the temporal, spatial, relational coordinates of lived experience – converge, is the virtual thought process made material. Contrastingly, in ‘On magic realism’, Jameson’s conception of affect is closer to Barthes’ *punctum* in which images flash ‘lightning-like’ within the frame, but which also have a metonymic power of ‘*expansion*’ that it tied to the conscious and unconscious thoughts of the subject. Brian Massumi’s statement that ‘affect is a real condition, an intrinsic variable of the late capitalist system’ with the ability to ‘produce an economic effect more swiftly and surely than economics itself’ (2002, 45), gives us an appropriate platform from which to consider Jameson’s use of the term in tandem with the subjective emotional responses that he discusses in ‘On magic realism’. Affect considered as a cognitive as well as psychological stimulus has both social and political significance for him. Jameson describes how particular objects or colours disrupt the narrative, and how the resulting affect can potentially undermine and challenge these versions of history, or at least highlight suffering and injustice within them. The following section considers the affect he describes in the three films under consideration, and how it accompanies changes in the colour palette, eruptions of violence, and strange tension in the narrative. As Massumi says ‘affect escapes’ (2002, 35); it confounds and it transgresses limits. Jameson’s is a more politicised version of Spinoza’s cognitive ‘Wonder’ in which he regards the artistic marvellous – the transformation of the object world - as consciousness-raising

xi. Colour as affect

Jameson’s explanation of the production of affect in ‘On magic realism’ describes images of ‘intensity’ that remind the viewer of something personal, or

²⁸ See Chapter Six ‘The affection-image: face and close-up’ in Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 2008, The affection-image can be a close-up of a face or an object. As an example Deleuze describes the final scene in Pabst’s *Pandora’s Box* in which Jack the Ripper’s knife is shown in chilling close up and prepares the viewer for the subsequent horror. He argues that the knife as pure image, pure object, could stand in for the action itself.

of matters exterior to the diegetic world. These produce contradictory affects, resulting in a delicious pain, or sharp shock that is often, Jameson suggests, triggered by a response to colour: a 'libidinal' reaction that 'intensifies the remnants in the present of what had been surgically excised of its other narrative temporalities' ('magic', 325). He makes a strong assertion that the 'look' of cinematic magic realism is connected to both the social and the psychological, which are combined in libidinal affect. He argues that the intensification, or withdrawal, of colour from an image can have a magical affect if the object or the mise-en-scene is derealised sufficiently to cause a visual shock. Recalling his reaction to a fleeting glimpse of a highly coloured object in Holland's *Fever*, he remembers: 'in particular the moment of the passing detail of an extraordinary violet apron: a punctual experience of rare intensity comparable to synaesthetic response: 'Baudelaire's "green so delicious it hurts."' (314)²⁹ In what amounts to less than a second of screen time, the viewer (Jameson) not only *sees* the screen object but tastes and feels it too.

Similarly, in *Condorez* a flash of bright pink candy floss held aloft by the assassin's daughter introduces a point of difference in which the contrast between the innocent pleasures of youth and the world of political violence that her father has constructed is intensified. The shock of this interruption is subsequently decoded into the image's secondary incarnation as a marker of ideological meaning. The latter apprehension can be related to Jameson's reading of Freud's uncanny, and the deconcealment of a hidden, forgotten or unrealised idea:

[The] "return of the repressed" makes itself felt by the garish and technicolor representation of what is given as an essentially black-and-white reality, figures as daubed and rouged as in photorealist painting, objects derealized by the very plenitude of their sensory being, by which the merely perceptual is unmasked as obsession.³⁰

Jameson argues that this 'striking' application of colour triggers an experience of pleasure or displeasure that is particular and non-homogenous, yet connected to

²⁹ Kandinsky believed that a certain quality in yellow: 'can be brought to a power and height unbearable to the eye and to the mind. When so intensified, it sounds like a shrill horn, blown constantly louder ...' (1946, 63).

³⁰ In 'On magic realism' (1986a, 315) Jameson cites from his earlier explanation of the uncanny in *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis the Modernist's Fascist*, 1981b, 57-58.

a perception of reality rather than an idealisation. Freud argues that estrangement is most easily produced in the paradoxical *heimlich/unheimlich* back and forth of the uncanny, 'when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary' (2003, 150). For Freud, the uncanny is tied to animism and magic (the transformation of the object world through the mechanics of the mind), just as for Jameson cinematic affect can be both uncanny and magical.

The blurring of the line between imagination and reality is activated in the correspondence between the image and the human mind, a visual and perceptual sorcery that is derived from and concludes in the film image. Freud called the subject's investment of libido (of mental or emotional energy directed towards an object, person, or idea) *besetzung*, which can be translated into English as *cathexis*. The libidinal intensities of magic realist film invest fantasy in social history, connecting subjective desire with objective existence: the libidinal apparatus 'endows a private fantasy-structure with a quasi-material inertness, with all the resistance of an object which can lead a life of its own and has its own inner logic and specific dynamics' (1981b, 10). The application of colour to particular images creates an affect that Jameson believes to signal the materialisation of thought as repressed or unfulfilled desires; and a sudden application of colour in an otherwise subdued palette operates on the viewer like 'punctual beats of energy' (1986a, 314). In Jameson's theory; these libidinal intensities mark a process whereby the 'ontological aspect' (Deleuze 2001, 230) of perception is tested. They signal the limits of human perception at the point in which the distance between exterior and interior collapses.

By linking magic realist film to the uncanny, Jameson inevitably introduces, by extension, a link between magic realism and modernism in which unconscious desires are revealed in the form of strangely juxtaposed objects. Such juxtapositions can 'awaken' reality by momentarily defamiliarising the diegetic world and challenging expectation through a sense of wonderment: 'To this deep and joyful curiosity must be attributed that stare, animal-like in its ecstasy, which all children have when confronted with something new, whatever it may be, face or landscape, light, gilding, colours [...]' (Baudelaire 1972, 398) Jameson's reaction to the violet apron is such a reaction and it changes his

perception of the diegetic world; the film makes possible ‘the awakening of fresh sight’ (1986a, 314).

Kandinsky argued that in paintings depicting weird and strange worlds, a careful aesthetic balance was necessary to avoid straying completely into the realm of the fantastic: ‘The utter impossibility of a red horse, if placed before us, demands an equally unnatural background. Otherwise, the entire effect can be taken for a freak (superficial and completely inartistic), or as a clumsy fairy-tale’ (1946, 83). Kandinsky’s words have a strong pertinence to the unusual colour balance that Jameson observes in Holland, Penzo, and Norden’s films. The dulled, faded and unnaturally tinted landscapes announce a familiar and known reality, but one which is non-mimetic and often unstable. Similarly, in Cezanne’s paintings, Jameson finds that a ‘heightened exaltation’ of bright colours are opposed to ‘the contracting counterforce of ochre, which winds this excitement down and effectively recontains its energies’ (1979b, 195) His description of the interplay between bright and dull tones corresponds neatly to the relationship between magic(al affect) and reality in cinematic magic realism. In Jameson’s analysis of Cezanne, the bright blues and greens burst forth from the ochre, yet at the same time the ochre acts to ‘contain’ and keep in check the energy and brilliance of their contrasting hues. This symbiotic mechanism of deconcealment accomplishes a transformation in perception whereby magic is revealed to be part of reality rather than separate from it. The object becomes magical because it seems always to be in the process of moving between states of being: buried, hidden, obscured, and bursting forth. As Deleuze argues, in cinema the affect evoked through the application of colour to a film image is one of power because it ‘absorbs’ the energy of everything around it; the colour becomes the affect (2008, 121).

Reality, in these three films is, from the outset, signalled to be unstable and undergoing a process of transformation. The history may be recognisable, but it is never fixed because the perspective shifts continuously. When an unnaturally vivid colour flashes onto the screen, a scene is heavily tinted, or the colour is desaturated, the affect is saved from mere artifice because it is consistent with the strange world from which it burst forth. Jameson finds colour to be a physical manifestation of the uncanny, but in cinematic magic realism this does not mean

that colour has to be symbolic: the violet of the apron has no necessary meaning; there are manifold possibilities for its interpretation; rather colour is part of the affectual *process* by which tension and disruption are underlined.

In literary magic realism realistic detail is enhanced and supplemented by descriptions of the vivid colours of the tropical locations. The golds, crimsons, blues and yellows of religious iconography, and fantastically-hued folkloric clothing are often highlighted. In Juan Rulfo's novel *Pedro Paramo* (1955) colours are associated with certain memories – grey sky with the protagonist's father's death – and the air magically changes the colour of objects. In *magischer realismus* painting artists employ yellows and whites to emphasise the light, and apply a glaze to emphasise the transparency of the still, reflecting skin of glass *objects*, such as the lightbulb and window composition in Scholz's *Cacti*, and the glittering water in Radziwill's German seascapes. Roh expresses the importance of coolness, smoothness, sharp focus and 'glass-like' space in these paintings of the inter-war years, (Menton 1983, 17) an 'airlessness' (Carra 1971, 201) that is 'weirdly' mimetic and faithful to the original object but flatter, brighter, and with a reduction in chiaroscuro that lends the objects their hyperreality. In 'On magic realism' Jameson pauses to consider a passage from Cuban novelist Pablo Armando Fernández's magical realist *Los niños se despiden* [The children say goodbye, 1968] in which the protagonist, in the throes of building a new world, reflects on the correlation between sensory perception and the recognition of objects in the exterior world:

People spoke of "weak" gray or "dead" gray, of "languid" or "rich" gray, of brilliant red, of brick red, of flesh red, of purple red, of yellowish red, of drab brownish red, of saffron red, fire red, carmine red, crimson red, scarlet red, burnt red, blood red, or sunset red, and distinguished between "dappled" colors and "veined" colors, between "speckled" and "marbled", and to each one of these they attributed specific qualities for certain crops (Fernández quoted in Jameson 1986a, 313).

Jameson selects this particular paragraph to draw attention to distinctions between colours that seem to awaken multiple senses. The reader recalls, perhaps, a tactile sensation from touching red bricks or from the damp air on a particularly languid afternoon. The distinction between the interior world of the human mind and the exterior world is blurred.

xii. The waning of affect reprised. Magritte as magic realist

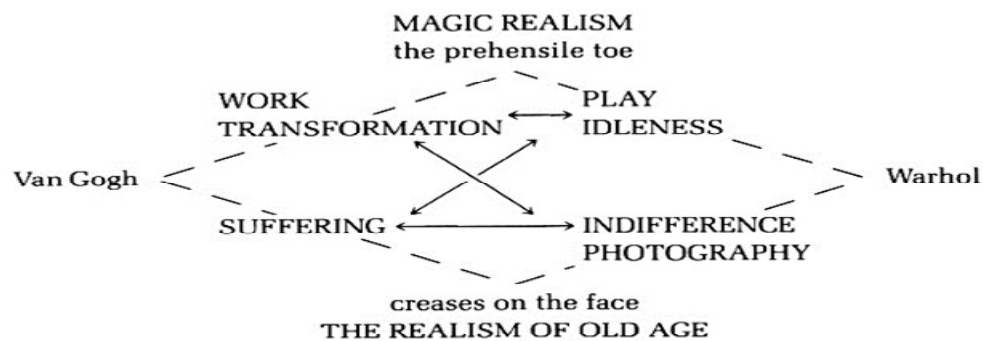


Figure 39: Taken from Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 1991, 10

Throughout 'On magic realism', Jameson repeatedly stresses the significance of uncanny images, of inner tension displayed in phsyical imagery, the erasure of the line between fantasy and reality, and disruption of temporal and spatial dimensions. Where he failed to convince the reader in *Postmodernism* due to his ambivalent and unsatisfactory reading of van Gogh and Warhol's paintings, he succeeds in his discussion of these films. This is due to his recognition of the need for a more finely nuanced structure within which to discuss art works that fall between categories, movements, or styles. In *Postmodernism* he was unable to resolve his ideas into a neat, one-way shift. This evidently weighed upon him, and after having further developed his 'new' mode of cinema in 'On magic realism' he reinvented the earlier *New Left Review* model for the introduction to his book-length version of *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* in 1991, adding two more works of art. The linear shift from left to right in the original is now transformed into a rhomboid diagram, a *combinatoire*, represented at each corner by a painting, with René Magritte's Surrealist painting of a mysterious pair of boots sprouting human toes – *Le modèle rouge* (1935³¹) – situated at its apex.

³¹ There are at least seven versions of this painting made between 1935 and 1948 (critical reports vary). The painting reproduced in *Postmodernism* is the version painted at some point between 1947 and 1948, according to the chronology set out in David Sylvester's monograph of the artist (2009, 277-279) Jameson's endnote does not give the date or the collection in which it is held. Each version has significant differences, with some (Moderna Museet Stockholm, 1935) less 'life-like' in tone and lacking the detail (the protruding veins, the flesh tones, the ephemera (including coins and a torn page depicted newsprint and a pornographic image of a scantily clad

The decision to reformulate his model occurred to Jameson after he read a response to his *New Left Review* article in the left wing Italian newspaper *Il manifesto*, written by Italian theorist Remo Ceserani in 1989. Ceserani expresses general agreement with Jameson's description of the shift from the modern to the postmodern, but argues that his two-strand model needs to reflect the more complex and contradictory nature of postmodernity. He argues that in Italy, for example: 'There is a strong current of classicism that runs through the entire history of Italian literature, as well as an equally strong current of expressionistic and rebellious deviations from classicism' (1994, 377). Jameson had, in fact, already started to address this complexity in his configuration of cinematic magic realism as an alternative to the postmodern 'nostalgia' film. The chronology of Jameson's revision is significant as it implicitly situates magic realism within his wider theorisation of the waning of affect, and highlights the persistent, 'seductive' quality it holds for him.

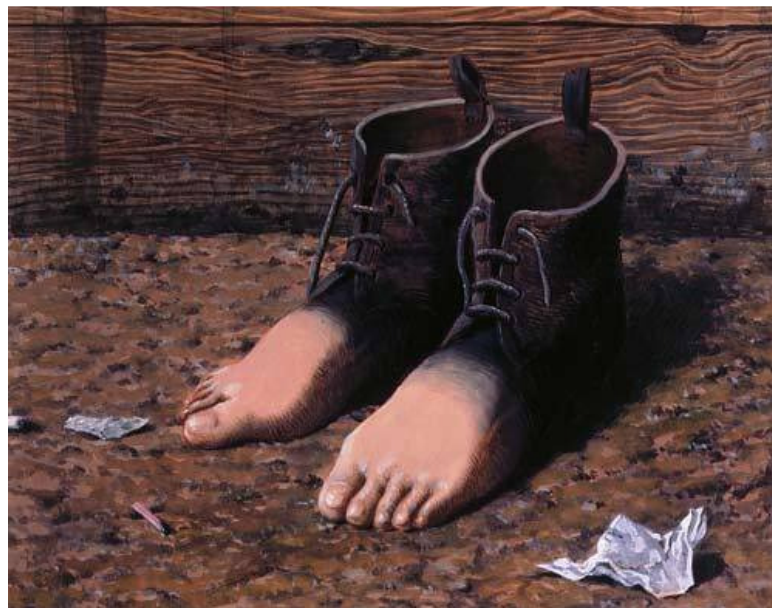


Figure 40: René Magritte, *Le modèle rouge* [The red model], 1935, oil on canvas, 56x46cm, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

woman) the clumps of earth and the dingy water marks on the wooden background) of later versions (the copy held by Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris being the most vivid in its corporeal representation). In the version reproduced in *Postmodernism* the veins on the feet have almost disappeared, the detail on the toes is less well-defined.



Figure 41: Walker Evans, *The work boots of Floyd Burroughs*, 1936

Significantly, Jameson takes up Ceserani's suggested additions of two more artworks (each depicting shoes) to his model: Magritte's ghostly boot-feet, and photographer Walker Evans' (1903-1975) monochrome photograph *The work boots of Floyd Burroughs* (1936) depicting life during the American Depression. To my mind this forms a connection back to Roh, and to Neue Sachlichkeit and the debates surrounding the recording of a 'new' reality with both interior and exterior aspects. In both of these additional works of art, a different, yet not antithetical, version of 1930s reality is presented. In Evans' photograph, situated at the bottom of the diagram (to which Jameson assigns the words 'Creases on the face: The realism of old age'), the farmer's boots are photographed from above, positioned as if the wearer had levitated out of them only several moments before. It was subsequently reproduced with writer James Agee's (1909 – 1955) socio-political commentary on rural poverty in Alabama. As in van Gogh's painting, the wear imposed upon the objects by the user is implicit, but instead of the textured brushstrokes that reveal traces of the artist's labour, the marks on Evans' monochrome boots signal to Jameson 'the realism of old age', perhaps due to the mimetic reproduction of the object which underscores the correlation between the leather and the worn face of the wearer. Through constant wear the boot takes on the imprint of the wearer:

They have visibly ... to the eye subtly taken the mold of the foot, and structures of the foot are printed through them in dark sweat at the ankles, and at the roots of the toes. ... I know that each man's

shoe, in long enough course of wear, takes as his clothing does the form of his own flesh and bones' (2001, 239).

Evans and Agee note that there is great pleasure to be taken in this personal relationship between the wearer and the boots. However, there is also an uncanny quality to Agee's description of the transformation of form that takes place through wear – the shoes take on the form of flesh and bones.

It is clear that the 'pathos' Jameson finds in van Gogh's painting is similarly evoked by Evans' photograph, but the modernist 'expression' is replaced by the realism of objectivity. Jameson does not mention Evans and Agee's photobook *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* [1941], which presents the fruits of their two-month trip in to the American South as 'a photographic and verbal record of the daily living and environment of an average white family of tenant farmers'. The project was designed as 'an independent inquiry into certain normal predicaments of human divinity' (Agee 2001, xi). The volume testifies to Evans and Agee's intentions regarding *The work boots of Floyd Burroughs*, which although not included in the book, was photographed during the same year. The object of their trip was to produce a 'non-"artistic" view' of the world in front of them, a document portrayal of rural poverty - the 'colossal peasant map' (Agee 2001, 7) of farms miles from the city. Rather than producing art, Evans and Agee stress that their aim is to prompt the reader to consider how rural poverty, exploitation and disease can be avoided.

Beginning with the deliberately ironic title of the book, the text has a political message that is linked to the photographs. Certainly there is an unrelenting realism to the faces and environment that they capture, yet their work draws comparisons with the carefully edited German photobooks of Neue Sachlichkeit photographers. Jameson labels Evans' photograph 'realism' rather than modernism, and given their anti-art intentions this makes sense, despite the Neue Sachlichkeit aesthetic of the aerial composition and incongruity between the boots and the empty field. It is significant to note that Evans and Agee find something so 'curious, obscene, terrifying, and unfathomly mysterious' (their unwavering sense of responsibility towards their [sometimes enforced] labour)' (2001, 6) in the circumstances of their subjects that 'a work of the imagination ... can at best only faintly imitate the least of it.' (2001, 10) They argue that the

‘unimagined existence’ of cotton tenants, the ‘normal predicaments of human divinity’ (2011, x) is hiding in plain sight within the object world. Their book aims to alter perspective in order to reveal the unknown, or unimagined. Yet their observations are also reminiscent of the Carpentierian ‘marvellous’ in which a remote vista is recorded and assessed through the eyes of the outsider

In Jameson’s diagram ‘realism’ and ‘modernism’ are linked by the word ‘suffering’, which in turn reminds us of his assertion in *The Postmodern Condition* that neither modernism nor realism were completely replaced by the movements that succeeded them but engaged with many of the same themes. Thus, Evans and Agee’s photograph marks a point of transition or convergence. Although it can be argued that their portrayal of Alabama farming communities is realist, Jameson fails to account for the ‘alien’ elements of reality that Evans argues for his photographs, or the uncanny suggestion in the transformation of leather into ‘human form’. These marvellous aspects may not be as evident to the viewer as those in Magritte’s painting, but in situating the work boots (realism) across from magic realism in the diagram, Jameson sets up a dichotomy that can only be undermined.

Accompanying Magritte’s painting are the words: ‘Magic realism: the prehensile toe’, which, as the diagram indicates, has resulted from the converging forces of modernism (work, transformation) and postmodernism (play, idleness), and represents an alternative version of realism. At first I read the adjective ‘prehensile’ as a reference to the potentially gripping toes in Magritte’s painting. Although the toes are actually positioned quite flat to the ground, they are brightly and fantastically highlighted; and in coupling them with the worm-like laces of the boots, Magritte achieves a magical *suggestion* of movement, of a wriggling into life. But a second interpretation of prehensile is also possible. Breton, in his lecture ‘What is surrealism?’ referred to Surrealism as the ‘strongly prehensile tail’³² gripping the rich legacy of romanticism. Could Jameson be signalling through his choice of adjective that magic realism, here at the apex of

³² See André Breton, ‘What is surrealism?’ (1979: 132). Magritte also painted a version of his famous painting *The Rape* for Breton’s 1934 Belgian edition of *Qu’est-ce que le surréalisme?* (published by Herriquez in Brussels) a fact that deepens the connection made here.

‘realism’, modernism’ and postmodernism, is inextricably linked to them all³³ ? Certainly his decision to label Magritte a magic realist, would suggest so, a decision partially explained by his assertion that Magritte’s painting, like magic realism, slips between the limits of categorisation: ‘Magritte, unique among the surrealists, survived the sea change from the modern to its sequel, becoming in the process something of a postmodern emblem: the uncanny’ (1991, 10).

Le modèle rouge is certainly uncanny in that the human toes sprouting from the end of the boots are at once strange and familiar. Although the connection between boot and wearer is implicit (which is also true for the other three examples in the diagram), portraying the join between the two as completely seamless forces the viewer to conceive of the supernatural as part of the real. This was Magritte’s intention. In 1934 he wrote to Breton stating that his aim ‘was to discover the property which belonged indissolubly to an object but which seemed strange and monstrous when the connection was revealed’ (Sylvester 2009, 271).

In his 1987 book *The Truth in Painting* (which Jameson does not cite in relation to Magritte), Derrida observes that while shoes and boots are detachable from the body, feet, whether ‘painted, ghostly or real’, are not (1987, 314). Magritte’s painting is a deliberate play on the ‘haunting’ shape of the human body that gradually over time becomes imprinted on shoes or clothes. As Derrida notes, shoes or boots are the only form of human clothing that can stand up without the body inside. Magritte’s shoes rise mysteriously (‘rising toward what?’ Derrida asks), evoking movement despite the feet’s severance at the ankle (neck) (314). Evans photographed a pair of boots that he saw imbued with mystery, but he does not attribute that mystery to a physical form. Magritte, on the other hand, paints what Freud calls the ‘omnipotence of thoughts’ (Freud, 2008, 99), emphasising the mysterious relationship between humans and the objects around them. ‘Magic’ Freud insists, ‘the technique of animism, clearly and

³³ In fact, Jameson cites the very passage in which Breton’s uses the term prehensile’ in a discussion of Surrealist imagery in *Marxism and Form* (1974, 97) in which he argues that Breton’s ‘sur-real’ practice creates a place for the renewal of the natural and naive imagination – a ‘new Romanticism’ (95) to ‘re-awaken the deadened external world’ (97). Jameson describes Romanticism as a movement that emerges in defence against the middle-class culture of capitalism. In Surrealism, he argues, artists similarly apply the narratives of ancient and mythical cultures, of the magical and fantastical to directly attack modern commodification.

unmistakably shows the tendency of forcing the laws of psychic life upon the reality of things' (2008, 101).

Magritte's series of paintings was based upon his discovery of 'a new potential inherent in things: the ability to gradually become something else, one object *merges* into another' (Magritte quoted in Olinger-Zinque 1998, 25). Therefore in paintings such as *Le modèle rouge* and *Philosophie dans la boudoir* (1947) (in which a nightgown hangs in a wardrobe with human breasts and a pair of high heeled shoes sprout perfectly manicured toes), the human body is revealed through the garments that usually conceal it and the line between the two is imperceptible. Magritte's juxtapositions are not made from disparate objects brought together to create a spark (as Ernst's photomontage) but rather emphasise the common connection between two elements, confusing the divide between our expectation and the unexpected.³⁴ There is still an element of shock or surprise, but it is created because of an affinity between objects and ideas rather than dissimilarity.

Magritte, like Max Ernst, has been labelled both a Surrealist and a magic realist, and many of his influences, which include Giorgio de Chirico and Edgar Allen Poe, were also those of Breton and Roh. That Jameson should choose Magritte to represent magic realism, then, is fitting considering the debates surrounding the two modes and their overlaps. Magritte, like Carpentier before him, had worked with the surrealists and later disassociated himself from them. Although Magritte's work is most often identified with the irrational and the strange, he remained adamant that the metamorphosing bodies, gigantically proportioned objects and wild juxtapositions in his work were within the realm of the real. He disliked psychoanalytic interpretations of his paintings³⁵, preferring to present them as a world of, albeit anamorphosised, real objects. In words that recall Roh's 'manifesto' for *magsicher realismus*, Suzie Gablik summarises Magritte's aesthetic: 'For Magritte, painting was a means of evoking a meta-reality which would transcend our knowledge of the phenomenal world. He referred to it

³⁴ David Sylvester, 2009, notes that Magritte had read *Valori plastici* (1918-1922), the Italian magazine that was a formative influence on Roh's *magsicher realismus* and Ernst's fondness for de Chirico (Spies, 1991).

³⁵ In 1937, Magritte complained about the analysis given by two London psychoanalysts of his painting: 'they think my picture 'The Red Model' is an example of castration [...] it is terrifying to see what one is exposed to in making an innocent sketch.' For an account of Magritte's opinions on psychoanalysis, see Hammacher, 1971, pp11-25

continually as “the mystery”’. (1970, 13) Here ‘transcend’ means to go beyond the perceived limits of human knowledge, and thus beyond social boundaries. As examples of magic realism, Magritte’s paintings combine the sober detail and objectivity of *magischer realismus*, the surprise and shock of the irrational in Surrealist works and as far as Jameson is concerned, challenge the stylistic and cultural limitations associated with the words modernism and postmodernism.

Jameson at no point explains to the reader why he has applied the term magic realism to Magritte’s *le modèle rouge* and it makes little sense without the essays on cinematic magic realism to shed light on his understanding of the mode. The boot-feet raise questions about the relationship between social order, nature and the human subject. The role of clothing in society can be linked to oppression; it can be fetishised - both desirable commodity and sexualised part - standing in for the body itself; and it can protect against the natural elements. The leather has become human, and yet the feet have been removed from the living body, they stand magically between the animate and the inanimate. What Freud terms as ‘magic’, is the imaginative process by which we link the two, and Magritte’s *Le modèle rouge* is suggestive of the simultaneous layering of continually flowing ideas that exist in the mind. Jameson systematically uses the term uncanny to refer to affect, arguing that what has been made visible in the art object results from repression, either in the individual or collective unconscious. However his assertion that Warhol’s shoes are without affect or meaning, emptied and ghostly, but that Magritte’s boot-feet are also postmodern yet resounding with hidden meaning and fantastic possibility, demonstrates the illogic of his diagram. On the other hand, I find the diagram to be characteristic of the indeterminacy that has surrounded magic realism since its inception, and as such believe that it is a befitting visualisation of the mode and its overlapping genres. Moreover, in assigning magic realism a pictorial representative – a Surrealist painting at that – Jameson unwittingly resurrects the European modernist lineage at the heart of *magischer realismus*. Above all, the painting represents the effortless, familiarly unfamiliar meeting of the concrete world of objects and the flickering images devised of the mind that cinema enables, and upon which theories of magic realism hang.

xiii. Magical objects: the image reveals all

In contradistinction to the stereotypical objects of literary magic realism – the alchemist’s crucible, an animated swarm of butterflies or bees, the circus ring, anthropomorphic animals, a box or mirror that facilitates time travel – the objects in cinematic magic realism are not immediately recognisable as marvellous. They become marvellous after manipulation, much like Roh and Moholy-Nagy’s photographic experiments in the microscopic and gigantic reproduction of ordinary things. In literary magic realism, the role of the object – the Fabergé eggs in Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus*, or Colonel Buendía’s gold fish in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, for example, – is often to provide an entry into, or a link to, another time frame or parallel reality. Flashbacks and flash-forwards have become ubiquitous in filmmaking to denote the passage of time, or to imagine interior thought as a sequence of images. In cinematic magic realism, the object serves as a bridge between past and present, and unconscious and conscious thought, but this does not always cohere with the narrative logic of the film. The object can also serve as a diversion from the main action, or as a signpost that encourages the viewer to look deeper. Jameson insists that the objects in these films are neither reified images in the postmodern sense, nor the coded enigmas and ‘supremely arbitrary decisions of the high modernist demiurge’ (1986a, 305). Instead what appears to constitute the ultimate object of cinematic magic realism is its ‘structural distance’ from the ‘lived experience’ of the films (306). Sutured into the film’s ontological reality, the viewer is suddenly jolted out of the narrative flow into an alternative: that of interior thought.

The clearest example of the object ‘function’ provided by Jameson is his exploration of the role of the strange incendiary device at the centre of *Fever’s* plot. This homemade bomb proves an unexpected alternative to the customary guns of early twentieth century conflict. The bomb travels with the revolutionary party members in search of a definitive human target. However, their plan to kill a Czarist official is ultimately doomed when the bomb fails to fulfil its promise. The film ends with the bomb safely detonated in a river to much derisive laughter from the Czar’s soldiers. The resulting explosion is an impotent gush of water that makes a mockery of the revolutionaries’ efforts; indeed most of them

are already dead at this point in the tale. The bomb has a dual presence as a physical object that is held and touched, and as an object of revolutionary aspiration. It becomes a magical object in which both plot and ideology are contained. It signifies hope –the hope of social change and the transformation of political and economic conditions; and misery, its mythical status for the revolutionaries quashed by the Czar’s soldiers.

The bomb is an example of an image that throws our perception of time and space into question. In the opening scene we see it for the first time, cropped in an extreme close-up that removes any clues as to its context. The viewer struggles to ascertain its meaning, imagining context and purpose. Suddenly drops of brilliant red blood fall onto the shiny metallic surface and only then does the camera slowly zoom out to reveal the source of the blood: the cut finger of the man presumably responsible for making the device. For Jameson, it is the ‘mint newness’ of the bomb that is ‘striking’ because its technology is juxtaposed against the dull, earthy palette of browns used to denote ‘the very old historical world’ (306). He reacts somewhat hyperbolically to this object, arguing that the gap between the close-up image and its historical setting seems too unreal, that such ‘new technology’ could not really exist in the pre-revolutionary world of Central Europe (306). He insists, confusingly, that the enormous ‘two-dimensional’ image of the bomb signifies ‘something else’ and is ‘not an image in the technical sense of derealization’ (306).

This ‘something else’ is never fully explained, the closest thing to an explanation being that it diverts the narrative in a ‘vertical’ direction: that it interrupts the linear flow of the narrative and causes the spectator’s attention to be momentarily drawn away. If we apply this thesis accordingly, the object – having achieved a quasi-magical status – undergoes a transformation due to the shift in perception as the viewer makes an associative link between it and ‘something else’. The ‘something else’ is beyond the control of the narrative, and outside of authorial intent, as it is added by the spectator – a hidden component. It is intangible in that we cannot touch it, and only have access to it through our own interaction with the films. I imagine it as looking something akin to the astrological photographs of the starry night skies or the meteorological thunderstorms that so fascinated Roh – numerous, unpredictable permutations

of matter that stir the imagination. The ‘something else’ does not reside in symbolism, closed meanings or conclusions, but in the freedom of association and possibility.

Thus, when the drops fall on the shiny surface of the bomb, the object is momentarily suspended without context, and the gap that Jameson observes between its newness and the historical context creates a mysterious tension. This object is invested with a strangeness that presents itself in a similar way to that of the uncanny object: it is ‘marked from within by an absent cause’ and the viewer proceeds to decode it by its ‘sheerest formal properties’ (316). The hyperbolically emphasised object is fundamental to magic realism. As art historian Peter Hinchcliffe observes of magic realism in painting: it ‘is magical because it can achieve the intensity which creates the illusion that every object – no matter how small or seemingly irrelevant can be injected with meaning’ (1986, 7).

The examples of cinematic objects given in ‘On magic realism’ are not heavily symbolic and not therefore reducible to ‘the windless solitude of the monad’ that Jameson reads in Munch’s scream of anxiety (1984a, 64). They point to ‘something else’ outside – a rupture in the linear and cyclical patterns of ordinarily measured experience – because they reproduce the limit, the boundary between interior and exterior worlds, because they occur between temporal and spatial demarcations. Emphasising the limit or the boundary between things, between states of being, ensures that they are not lost in an endless reproduction of reified fragments. The magical real object resists reification, it poses questions. The affect therein lies with a modified expressionism: the exteriorising of collective polymorphous and hybrid ideas.

For Jameson, the waning of affect in postmodern culture is tied to a lack of awareness. Dialectical thinking, or the will to penetrate the many discourses of the real (scientific, political, social, artistic), should, Jameson argues, provide a shock that creates the potential for change. Affect is caused by a transitional moment of self-reflective awareness in which various layers and systems of meaning are revealed at once in a synaesthetic surge: ‘There is a breathlessness about this shift from the normal object-oriented activity of the mind to such

dialectical self-consciousness – something of the sickening shudder we feel in an elevator’s fall’ (1974, 308).

xiv. Events: radical collisions

As well as ‘shared features’ of history and colour, Jameson also notes a particular narrative structure operating within cinematic magic realism – of a poetic transformation of the object world³⁶ through the narration of fantastic events. In his reading of Norden’s *Condores* the cinematic ‘event’ is first discussed in relation to magic realism. What Jameson finds particularly convincing and affective, is how ‘the problem of the peculiar relationship of narrative dynamic to the visual (and also to a certain new presence to History) becomes visible’ (1986a, 319). Within the film he notes a series of ‘events’ that prevent narrative closure: an ‘interminable and indeed implacable series of unremittingly violent acts’ (302). Here he determines that, firstly, the cinematic magic realist event should not be confused with the traditional literary or classical cinematic event as a narrated ‘happening’ or episode that develops a plot or story in a linear direction. The event cannot be described according to temporal or chronological logic³⁷. It is an unfolding of ideas (very similar to the baroque image described by Deleuze), and in cinematic magic realism, it signifies movement, specifically a visual expansion of the processes of dialectical thought. The intensity of an image fades and another takes its place, but there are no rules or formulas for how long or in what form this will take. The events form part of an interminable flow, and in cinematic magic realism these can range from a five minute long investigation of a crime scene, to a momentary flash of violent action.

If, as Jameson argues, magic realist films question hegemonic or monolithic ideas by highlighting certain events to raise questions about how things come into being and how ideas are formed, these do not function in a conventional way.

Comparing cinematic magic realism with the novels of García Márquez, Jameson

³⁶ Earlier I mentioned Andy Merrifield’s citing of poetry as an artistic weapon against ruling social classes and reification: ‘Poetry resides somewhere else, somewhere inaccessible to power’ and can strike ‘with the certainty of lightning’, (2011, 162-163). Jameson’s poetic transformation can also be read as an altering of the socio-political from outside.

³⁷ This idea is not exclusive to ‘On magic realism’ and the event features in his other writings with the definition remaining fairly consistent, as this description of modernism illustrates: ‘The event [of the emergence of modernism] seems to contain within itself synchronically the very logic or dynamic of some diachronic unfolding over time’ (2002, 33).

highlights mutual anthropological and postcolonial concerns, but also a fundamental element of the mode which operates across both film and literature: the visualising of the gap between narrative and history. He addresses how real events are transformed and granted greater affect through particular styles of narration, such as Márquez's self-proclaimed 'new and sweeping utopia of life' (1982, n.p.). Creators of magic realism underscore a tension that Jameson considers to be:

profoundly characteristic of all Utopian discourse, between description and narrative, between the effort of the text to establish the coordinates of a stable geographical entity, and its other vocation as sheer movement and restless displacement, as itinerary and exploration and, ultimately, as event ([1977]1988, 95).

The event was already a key concept in Jameson's theory of affect before he embarked upon an examination of magic realist narrative in film, and it can be traced in his writing on literary narratives. As a prelude to his reading of the event in Norden's *Condores*, the next section offers a brief examination its function as described in his writing on modernist literary narratives.

xv. Marxism, modernism and narrative

As Hayden White has noted, Jameson's theory of overlapping historical epochs involves a critique of the ways in which these periodisations and shifts are narrated; for Jameson all artistic attempts to represent reality are fundamentally ideological (White 1990, 147-9). In *Marxism and Form*, Jameson proposes a 'Marxist stylistics' in which 'the art-sentence itself, as it has been so variously cultivated and practiced in modern times from Flaubert to Hemingway, may be seen alternatively as a type of work or mode of production' ([1971] 1974, 397). Within this production of narrative commentary and storytelling, Jameson defines potential disruption in the form of the event: 'In modern literature, indeed, the production of the sentence becomes itself a new kind of event *within* the work, and generates a whole new kind of form' (1974, 397). Modernist writers, he argues, building on the legacy of predecessors such as Gustave Flaubert and Henry James, break with conventions of realist narrativity in order to draw attention to the increasing alienation of human activity from the exterior world. Citing Breton's famed dislike of novels, he proposes that Surrealism's

linguistic juxtapositions and emphasis on contingency go much further, refusing narration to reawaken the 'deadened external world around us', splitting open 'the commodity forms of the objective universe by striking them against each other with immense force' (1981b, 96-7). The event – the sentence or line of poetry – has its own logic, that of irrealising (or in the above example sur-realising) the exterior world, choosing to represent it in fragments, often out of order and without the logic of linear continuity. The collision of the words representing these fragments creates a series of shocks that prevent cohesive narrative linearity.

In the same year as *Marxism and Form*, Jameson also penned his monograph on Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957), *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*³⁸, which focuses on the event in the artist's objectivised portrayal of subjective relations. As a narrative device, an event emerges vividly from the background story or a detailed passage describing a setting as an 'independent structure of which one can write a history'. This history, Jameson argues, becomes accessible in its dynamic unfolding of 'an objectified fantasy-structure' (1981b, 19), thereby linking the personal to the political, or the interior to the exterior. His monograph of Lewis focuses on literary narrative as both structure *and* content, describing the event as 'an apparatus capable of being invested with all kinds of supplementary meanings' (48). In Lewis' first novel *Tarr* (1918) (set in Paris circa 1900 - 1914), for example, the protagonists clash both physically and mentally, their backgrounds and ideologies, their gender and class 'performed' as separate events – a burst of frustrated anger, a fight, a rape - with their own beginning, middle and end. These 'abstracted' micro-stories express the most intimate parts of subjective reality at a distance, and to an extent uncontrolled and unbound. Jameson explains how an event in *Tarr* can range from a passage in which a face is transformed by a rush of emotion, to a more 'global and less familiar molar unity [...] a duel, a struggle, a contest of every instant, a situation of strategic and tactical embattlement'³⁹ in which national,

³⁸ Lewis's work is often framed within a critical analysis that centres on accusations of racism, elitism and anti-feminism, and is not an obvious choice to include in a discussion of magic realism, but his novels pose questions about 'modern' society that interest Jameson.

³⁹ Here Jameson uses Deleuze and Guattari's terminology from *Anti-Oedipus* – the molecular and the molar (which Jameson translates to correspond to the microscopic fragments of the individual psyche, and the larger, mass unities of the social, respectively) to provide an *aesthetic*

political and class struggles are played out in miniature. Such events present a ‘whole new ideological dynamic’ that punctuates and disrupts the narrative, thereby interrupting its ‘telling’ of history.

For Jameson, Lewis’ writing is not avant-garde in the same way as a Surrealist text, but his representations of inner life and of violent acts (presented in the form of de-subjectivised objects⁴⁰ and convulsive episodes respectively) illustrate how ‘an authentic way of grappling with a Real [...] must always transcend it’ (1981b, 44) – by which he means go beyond, rather than become detached from. The event performs the join between an ideological framework and the real, it is a bearer of action (what Jameson refers to as an *actant*), and carries with it both psychological and socialised meaning. This dynamism is employed through what Jameson terms Lewis’ mechanical ‘expressionism’ (1981b, 2), or ‘radical form of realism’ (54); and the event as de-narrativisation device forms part of this structural self-conscious practice. The event is a working through of crisis and instability, of clashing world views. It reiterates the discontinuities, sensations, and authenticities of ‘genuine human life’ (1981b, 49) into ‘unimaginable infinitesimality’ (1981b, 31). Similarly, in ‘On magic realism’ Jameson contemplates the ways in which Henry James’ (1843-1916) ‘experimental’ novels introduce events that potentially subvert or expand narrative. James introduces minutiae – inconsequential and detailed passages – into his stories that are antithetical to plot development in their interruption of narrative flow and resistance to immediate assimilation:

the meta-physical or ideological charge in such narrative practices comes when the question about the event is tormented to yield a supplementary answer about what living really is ... [and] the more general philosophical question about the Event itself may rise (1986b, 320).⁴¹

means of explanation for discontinuities between the psychological and the socio-political in Lewis’ work. As he explains in a footnote, he uses *Anti-Oedipus* to structure ‘the description of and apologia for a new type of discourse: the discontinuous, “schizophrenic” text.’ (see Note 6, 1981b, 7)

⁴⁰ For example, the four main protagonists are often described in inanimate terms: Tarr’s soul as a transparent object existing in the air outside himself, or Bertha compared to what Jameson calls an ‘abject little room’ (1981b, 44).

⁴¹ In this particular essay Jameson switches between upper and lower case – the lower case ‘event’ seeming to pertain to the ordinary usage of event as incident or episode, and the upper to the

Significantly Jameson uses the word ‘meta-physical’ alongside ideological, at once uniting the ontological with the socio-political imagination. In cinematic magic realism the event is part of the magic; it slows or pauses the action, sometimes introducing strange and unknown elements, thereby diverting the viewer’s attention. Jameson argues that this diversion introduces the space for philosophical discussion, and this should also remind us that the Surrealist imperative to shock was also aimed at opening up art to serve as a radically dialectical tool. De-narrativisation in cinematic magic realism does not abandon plot or narrative entirely but does render the overarching structure of conventional narrative ‘effectively neutralized, to the benefit of a seeing or a looking in the filmic present’ (1986b, 321).

What matters to Jameson is how Lewis’ and James’ self-conscious narrativity present versions of history through material objects while using the form of the narrative to comment on them from a seemingly external position. And here we can make the leap from Lewis’ avant-garde objectivity to magic realism, both of which decentre the subject and foreground the exteriority of social experience in order to critique it. Conventionally, magic realist literature achieves this by creating exterior worlds or time frames from which to re-view history. Jameson’s theorisation of cinematic magic realism, while thematically joined to its literary counterpart through a post-colonial politics, also relies on the structural processes of a literary modernism in which social history is narrated at a distance, objectifying the movement between private thought and the social environment.

xvi. The cinematic event

Jameson defines cinematic events as ‘image-sequences’ that are inserted ‘vertically’ into the narrative, but do not correspond to a narrative symbolism (1986a, 305). His analysis of Norden’s *Condors* addresses similar points to those raised in his critique of Lewis and James’ literary modernism; however the event is now specifically part of a cinematic style in which magic operates. The transformation of the main protagonist, ‘el condor’ Léon Maria, from petty-bourgeois political follower into a ‘preternatural force of violence and retribution’ (318) does not follow conventional narrative. Jameson’s argument

event as a condensed point of the narrative within which philosophical questions are raised. I shall use the lower case throughout to avoid confusion.

stresses two main factors that constitute a 'de-narrativisation': firstly, that the transformation of Léon Maria does not follow a typical trajectory from private to public (psychological biography to collective ideology); and secondly that the violent episodes connected to him are channelled through a 'reduction to the body' whereby killing, sickness, sex, guilt, and obsession become mini-narratives separate to the plot.

Although the viewer is made aware of the psychological factors that determine Léon Maria's daily routine, the film does not follow his transformation as one would a conventional hero's, and only minimal traces of plot remain intact. *Condores* does not foreground morality through a rites of passage narrative, nor does it turn the private destiny of the protagonist into a collective political fantasy. What the film offers instead, Jameson argues convincingly, is a multiplicity of episodes that are channelled through a body that, rather than becoming political, is already politicised: Léon Maria represents a quotidian reality through which antagonistic political forces – the 'eternal rivalry between Liberals and Conservatives' (318) are threaded. He is an everyman, and his body is the ordinary flesh upon which the extraordinary power of ideology and its ability to affect and transform the social is branded.

The multiple perspectives enabled by the camera ensure that Leon María's body, like bodies objectified in Lewis' *Tarr*, carries the film, not as its narrator, but rather as a conductor of events in which the problematic social environment becomes embodied. His body is fashioned into episodic events that mark a metamorphosis, which I have noted as follows: his cold indifference to the burning of a young boy is revealed in a close-up of his expressionless face reflecting the yellow flames; we see his body stiffen, striding about town asserting authority, and crumple as the twin legacies of his childhood – asthma and prudishness – render him ineffective and weak; and in the final scene we contemplate his corpse abandoned in an alleyway with all traces of revolutionary fervour and stubborn pride extinguished as the camera pulls away in search of the next event. Leon María's body is a metamorphosing object upon which multiple ideologies are formed into a visual narrative; his body rather than his self tells the story.

The event is not something that can be assigned a specific temporal limit. In fact, Jameson likens the affect of an event to a perpetual present, what Vivian Sobchack refers to as ‘increasing representational immediacy’ (1996, 5) in which the chronological or temporal logic of dominant discourse is dissolved, and this remains a central paradox in his definition of cinematic magic realism. In his assessment of postmodern culture, he defines schizophrenic affect in material (as opposed to psychological) terms, whereby schizophrenia refers to the extreme refraction and fragmentation of reality. To the magic realist film he applies both the clinical and cultural implications of schizophrenia, referring to an eternal present in which the subjective (individual, psychological) and the objective (collective, social, and material) are both contained (Jameson’s terms). Rather than the depthless fragmentation of a schizophrenic postmodernism, schizophrenia (or what here seems closer to synaesthesia) takes on the significance of intense simultaneity.

In *Postmodernism and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson repeats the Lacanian view of schizophrenia as a pathological state in which the subject is unable to distinguish difference. Lacan defines schizophrenia as a breakdown in the signifying chain, in which signifier and signified have become detached and confusion results from the conflation of usually distinct and ordered states of being. Reading Lacan’s analysis of the Schreber case⁴² in ‘On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis’, Jameson identifies schizophrenia as characteristic of the postmodern condition: ‘chiefly because – as description rather than diagnosis – it seems to me to offer a suggestive *aesthetic* model’ (1991, 26; my emphasis). Inspired by Lacan’s words that ‘nowhere is the symptom more clearly articulated in the structure itself’ than in the case of psychosis (2006, 537), Jameson argues that it is not signified meaning, but rather a metonymic chain of signifiers formed through a subject’s failed relationship to language that organises the objects of the dominant social order. The process of what Deleuze and Guattari call ‘schizoanalysis’ is chosen to comprehend the fragmented

⁴² For Lacan’s analysis of Judge Schreber, see ‘On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis’, in *Écrits*, (trans. by Bruce Fink) 1966, 449-453. The case of schizophrenic Schreber, who hears voices and experiences heightened perceptions of ‘reality’ is analysed by Lacan through the patient’s relationship to the Law-of-the-Father (issues centred around his own masculinity: not fathering children, anxious about losing his esteemed profession as a judge). Jameson attests to his finding the link between this particular case and his theory of postmodernism in *Anti-Oedipus*.

materiality of the postmodern unconscious. The disease's flux of signifiers is used as a structural model to represent the disrupted, yet cyclical, temporality of postmodernity, 'a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers' (Lacan 2006, 26). Deleuze and Guattari argue that schizophrenia is a *process* of communication, a production of meanings tied to the continual flux of history. Jameson is reluctant to completely de-emphasise the impact of psychoanalysis; his theory of magic realism, for example, relies heavily on Freudian themes for an explanation of a potential 'meaning-effect' (1991, 26). However, Deleuze and Guattari's description of desire as a mode of production resonates with his own materialist reading of the fantasy-structure of history. Fantasy is not a projection onto objective reality but a part of that reality: a 'protonarrative structure as the vehicle for our experience of the real' (1981a, 33).

Deleuze and Guattari's 'schizoanalysis' and Lyotard's libidinal theory augment Jameson's structural apparatus for discussing cultural shifts, but Jameson's analysis remains steadfastly political. Where the French theorists' circulate virtual hypotheses, he attempts to locate alternative *collective* fantasies that challenge depthless fragmentation. In postmodernism and magic realism, Jameson finds two distinct systems of visual representation that respond to the decentred subject, and his or her response to 'a series of pure and unrelated presents in time' (1986a, 27).

The citation from a patient's diary (which Jameson first discovered in *Anti-Oedipus*), rather than illustrating the fragmentary experience of postmodernism, describes a magical real event in which reality and unreality are simultaneously experienced. As she walks past a school, a group of children singing triggers a strange shift in perspective: 'It seemed to me that I no longer recognized the school, it had become as large as a barracks [...] At the same time my eye encountered a field of wheat whose limits I could not see [...] The yellow vastness [...] filled me with such anxiety'.⁴³ The exterior world seems to become larger and larger until it is unrecognisable. She continues: 'It was the first appearance of those elements which were always present in later sensations of unreality: illimitable vastness, brilliant light, and the gloss and smoothness of natural

⁴³ This citation is taken from Maguerite Séchehaye's *Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl*, 1968, and quoted in *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 27

things' (1991, 27). These unreal visions could be said to correspond to 'events' in which the 'incompatibility' of the real and the magical is foregrounded in 'arrested contradiction' (1986a, 323).

A Thousand Plateaus states that: 'A microscopic event upsets the local balance of power.' (1987, 16) For Deleuze and Guattari an event is a 'perverse mutation' of the hegemonic order, a hallucination, an imagined scene, a poignant memory (16). To explain how the balance of power is upset Deleuze and Guattari offer several examples that illustrate how an 'intensive trait' (16) becomes independent of dominant discourse. A hallucinatory or a synaesthetic perception may 'start working for itself', i.e. independently of social norms. In cinema a hallucinatory image may startle the viewer, catching him or her off guard, breaking away from the plot. It becomes, as Jameson suggests, an event, a mini-plot or episode that operates separately from the narrative. In a clinical sense, hallucinatory perception is considered a delusion. But in magic realism, this shift in perception – the glimpse of 'something else' – transforms reality rather than abandoning it.

Deleuze and Guattari propose perception as proceeding out of vagueness and chaos, 'affective events begin in a *powerful indetermination*' (Bertelsen and Murphie 2010, 139), whereas Jameson remains adamant that indeterminability is both effect and affect of specific personal and political disjunction. The event functions at a distance – in the liminal space between the real and the imagined, the past, present and future; it is unfixed. The magical tense – an 'absolute present' – comprised of a succession of events (2003, 710), sets the permeable boundaries of an imaginary space in which resistance to the limitations of the dominant discourse is played out. It cannot be subsumed by any one dominant ideology, but its function is to affect the viewer, prompting an uncovering of something hidden within the diegesis. Nothing in cinematic magic realism can be taken for granted, but thanks to shifts in the 'mode of perception', everything has the potential to be transformed, to be 'something else'.

Ultimately, 'On magic realism' is unsatisfactory as a theorisation for the cinematic mode as it relies too heavily on Jameson's personal choice of films and his reactions to them. I, for example, felt nothing at the flash of violet apron in

Fever. Rather than offering a completely convincing framework, it is a starting point, and marks a movement towards a global, multi-media and synaesthetic re-imagining of magic realism. It is most successful in its linking of cinematic magic realism to the portrayal of a multi-layered, poly-referential historical past that is based in reality. What I recognise in ‘On magic realism’ is a recurring attempt on Jameson’s part to express the cultural and historical overlaps, or impasses, in which Roh, Cocteau, Kyrrou and Carpentier’s ‘something else’ spills outwards, escaping the constraints of socially or aesthetically prescribed borders. His lexicon– affect, event, vital episode, libidinal intensity, vertical disruption – is highly emotive. What Jameson discovers in the three films marks a significant return to the debates of the 1920s and 1930s in which film art was first broken down into form, content, and affect. The weakness of ‘On magic realism’ lies, perhaps, with the fact that Jameson is not an artist or filmmaker. He does not engage fully with the technical terms that Richter, Man Ray, Vertov, Eisenstein, or Buñuel employed in their writing on the cinema. However, in 1992 he attempts a second theorisation of cinematic magic realism, which focuses more closely on the ways in which the diegetic world is filmed, and examines the philosophical and technical aspects of a ‘Soviet magic realism’ in film. Once again the application of ‘magic realism’ seems quite arbitrary. Jameson believes that Sokurov’s cinematic abstraction of the Soviet science fiction genre, with its nod to the fairytale, re-evaluates Soviet realist cinema, and finds it: ‘lifted into something rather different (which I have abusively called magic realism for lack of a better characterization)’ (1992a, 90). However, where ‘On magic realism’ was somewhat mitigated by his quite arbitrary choice of three films, ‘Soviet magic realism’ focuses on a single filmic example, and delves further into a paradoxical world of quasi-science fiction in order to grasp how ideology and aesthetics function in tandem.

xvii. Soviet Magic Realism and metagenre: theory in practice

The aim of ‘Soviet magic realism’ seems on the surface to be the assignation of a genre to a film that does not fit neatly into categories of national cinema, science-fiction, documentary, or the avant-garde. In an earlier essay⁴⁴, in which

⁴⁴ ‘Historicism in The Shining’ (originally published in *Social Text* in 1981) and later published as a chapter in *Signatures of the Visible* alongside ‘On magic realism in film’, (1992c).

he had already started theorising hybrid ‘alternatives’ to the nostalgia film, Jameson delineates a kind of filmmaking that takes on the ‘modern’ era of cinema and the genre film (film noir, auteur films) and brings it into the postmodern era without pastiche and ‘indulgent’ commodification. He terms this ‘new’ film, evidenced in the independently produced work of Stanley Kubrick, Nicholas Roeg, Robert Altman and Roman Polanski, ‘metageneric’ (1992c, 84). Jameson argues that these directors question their social and cultural roots rather than blandly idealising them. Whilst this has also been argued of *auteurs* of the 1950s and 1960s, he insists that Kubrick *et al* produce totally new combinations of historical cinematic styles. He argues, for example, that the cycle of commodification in postmodern culture can be ‘broken’ by artists who ‘are willing to include a future in their present and to register the nascent pull of science fiction or utopia within the logic of their forms themselves’ (85). The diegetic worlds in such films as Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) or Roeg’s *The Man who Fell to Earth* (1976) involve a deliberate hybridity, or ‘metageneric’ construction that Jameson interprets as reaction to the ‘impossibility of realism - and more generally, the impossibility of a living culture which might speak to a unified public about shared experience’ (120). At no point, however, does he relate this to magic realism. The significant difference between these First World directors and his later cinematic magic realism is a geo-political one in which the Soviet totalitarian infrastructure is a real terror.

The interjection of a science-fiction or fantastical element, combined with the strongly-felt authorial imprint of the director, and the multi-layered narrative form of the ‘metageneric’ film are further discussed in Jameson’s ‘Soviet magic realism’. He investigates the way in which various genre conventions are subverted and juxtaposed in Alexander Sokurov’s ‘Second World’ film, *Dni zatmeniy* [*Days of Eclipse*, Russia, 1988], and the ways in which this manufactured cultural hybridity comes to represent the multi-ethnic, multi-national, multi-lingual and poly-religious geopolitics of the former Soviet Union. Sustaining the postcolonial themes introduced in ‘On magic realism’, he elaborates the visual criteria outlined in his readings of Holland, Penzo and Norden’s films. In particular Jameson delves deeper into the ‘unresolved antinomy’ (to borrow

Chanady's term) between the real and the marvellous, and gives clearer examples of what, for him, constitutes the supernatural. Whereas 'On magic realism' lacks the more detailed textual critiques found in the literary criticism of Chanady, Faris, Zamora, and Bowers, and others, 'Soviet Magic Realism' benefits from a theoretical approach that is tested through Sokurov's film.

Jameson's discussion of *Days of Eclipse* represents a substantial personal interest in Soviet politics. It traces the mode in the 'neo-colonial' enclaves of Eastern Europe and specifically in the Eurasian identities portrayed in Sokurov's film. Jameson has repeatedly suggested in his writings that he finds a utopian vein, an overriding desire for the end to totalitarian power, in Soviet film and literature. As noted earlier, this utopianism is fundamental to Jameson's dialectical investigation into an 'alternative' mode of postmodernism, particularly in his analyses of certain modernist works. In 'On magic realism' utopian themes were not discussed in terms of narrative but in the release of intensity in the images themselves, but in 'Soviet magic realism' *Days of Eclipse* is used to illustrate how utopianism functions at every level of cinematic magic realism from genre to the politics of historical context.

In this case utopia is not a location for radical alternatives (which Jameson attributes to modernist art) but 'simply the imperative to imagine them' (2007, 416). Sokurov's depiction of Turkmenistan (based on Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's science fiction novel *A Billion Years before the End of the World*, (1978) (aka. *Definitely Maybe*) presents a world in which the imaginary plays a central role. Accelerated entropy – the disintegration of both human life and the natural world – and obsessive paranoia are woven into a 'fairy tale' (1992a, 101), in which political power and national identity can be addressed, albeit at a distance. In contrast to the three films discussed above, Sokurov's film is more obviously magically real in that it combines elements of science-fiction, folklore, supernaturalism, fantasy, the carnivalesque and the Uncanny, that function to create a world within a world. Like the literary worlds of García Márquez and Carpentier in which the reader is transported to alternative visions of Colombia, Haiti, or Venezuela, the town of Krasnovodsk on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea, where the film is shot, is a portrait of the one in which Sokurov grew up, but continually metamorphoses between this reality and a magical place in which

there seem to be no boundaries. The town remains unnamed in the film, but the geographical specificity is clear, and the dialogue combines the languages of its indigenous and exiled people: Turkmen, Russian, and Azerbaijani. Sokurov builds a mysterious atmosphere that corresponds to the threat of late capitalism in 1988 Turkmenistan.

It has been noted that 'due to its vastness, the Russian Empire was still exotic to itself' (Soroka 2007, 335), and not only to those outside the Iron Curtain. From the Carpathian mountain region of the Ukraine, to the more modernised cities of Georgia, an uneven combination of native peoples and immigrants was thrust together and ruled by Russian and Soviet ideologies of power. Within these nation states and communities a complex network of religions, customs, and beliefs co-existed, the legacy of hundreds of years of Asian and European colonisation. It is this two-fold history of oppression and human displacement that Jameson considers to be the 'original culture of the Second World' (2007, 292). He argues that Soviet and Eastern European novels and films have a 'disquieting' effect on the 'Western' consumer that is 'indistinguishable from naive sentimentalism' (292). The absence of the mass-produced commodity in Second World culture (not only cinematic magic realism) is shocking in the First World, which is dominated by the endless noise of consumerism. Jameson insists that the dystopian worlds and themes that he finds to be characteristic of First World film and literature become utopias in their Soviet counterparts. In Soviet film and literature all that is wrong with capitalism and First World commodity culture is held up to 'the radical strangeness and freshness of human existence and of its object-world in a non-commodity atmosphere' (2005, 292).⁴⁵ As an 'outsider' his regard for Sokurov's filmmaking rests on personal utopian fantasy, however, *Days of Eclipse* examines both the potential for negative and positive

⁴⁵ This comment, written after the publication of *Soviet Magic Realism*, in 2005, demonstrates the persistence with which Jameson continually asserts a 'special case' for Soviet film. As with 'On magic realism' however, he gives a somewhat impressionistic and idealised snapshot of non-First World cinema that would benefit from greater direct citations from the Soviet filmmakers and industry workers themselves. His reading of Soviet film lacks the detailed analysis offered by such Russian film critics as Mikhail Yampolsky, Marina Drozdova and Sergei Selianov. The latter's 'Cinema and Life' 1997, in Birgit Beumers (ed.) 1999, *Russia on Reels: The Russian Idea in Post-Soviet Cinema* gives particularly illuminating insight into post-Perestroika Russia, the changes to everyday life and the disappearance of the myth of 'abroad' that slowly began to influence how Russia was to re-define itself. This is in fact a reversal of the idealistic 'exterior' that Russia provides for Jameson's First World intellectuals.

transformation in its imaginary realm. It is important to resist equating magic realism with a perfectly functioning version of (non-capitalist) society; cinematic magic realism does not always produce viable or preferable alternatives to the reality it is critiquing. *Days of Eclipse*, for example, does not offer a clear conclusion or happy ending, and Jameson skirts over significance of the uncertainty at the film's end. But, although Jameson's ideological position is extremely clear, indicating to the reader that Sokurov's film will be read from a First-World Marxist perspective, this seems to drive his interest in the aesthetic qualities of the film rather than limiting his analysis to one only concerned with political content.

xviii. Background

Jameson's 'Soviet magic realism' discusses a period of Soviet cinema (ranging from the early 1970s to the 1990s) that he argues is nationalistic and yet suffused with the hybridity of the colonial past and impending globalisation. *Days of Eclipse* was released when Mikhail Gorbachov had been in office for two years and the fate of the former Soviet states was as yet unknown. In the words of Ian Christie, Sokurov was 'almost literally, born of Soviet cinema's perestroika in 1986' (1999, 63). Russian critic Sergei Selianov describes how the relationship between the former Soviet Union and the First World changed completely after the parting of the 'iron curtain'. In his essay 'Cinema and Life' (1997), Selianov observes that: 'the country opened up and the powerful myth of abroad collapsed [...] Living in Russia, it was very important to know that somewhere out there was such a different world. Suddenly it transpired that there is no other world. This is what we have lost' (Selianov 1997, 45). This realisation is made materially evident in Sokurov's film, as its hybrid aesthetic is deliberately constructed to correspond to the fact that, as Selianov argues, between 1986 and 1997, the structures and patterns that had previously defined the Soviet Union 'disappeared', a deregulation that is still in the process of realisation. As we shall see, Sokurov plays with erasure and superimposition to suggest the dissolution of both real and imagined borders; and the dominating presence of a hazy, ill-defined outside world, or outside force in the film is tied to the fear that the townsfolk have for any totalitarian oppression – communist or capitalist. Although Jameson rarely considers the question of myth and exoticism from anything other than a First

World perspective he nevertheless understands that capitalism had become ‘the mysterious “alien” power that enigmatically impedes development’ (1992a, 110).

Jameson’s analysis is an exploration of Sokurov’s neo-modernist translation of a novel that deals with the threat to humankind from a ‘supercivilization’. The Strugatsky brothers’ intention was to portray the creative mind under the pressure of totalitarian rule.⁴⁶ Sokurov’s film is far removed from the narrative scenes of the original (as the authors have themselves testified⁴⁷) but retains the thematic concerns of intellectual oppression (several of the protagonists are insistently urged to abandon their research or artistic pursuits), and entropy, the minute shifts in the earth’s atmosphere that edge it towards destruction. The billion years of the novel’s title refers to the scientific research being carried out by its four protagonists in their ‘microscopic attempts to overcome entropy’ (Strugatsky 1978, 104). A character originally dismisses an old folk tale about nine immortal wise men, but finds that something in the story lingers in his mind. He eventually concludes that ‘there are no aliens and no ancient wise men, but something else, some force - and our work is getting in its way’ (1978, 70). In Sokurov’s film neither aliens nor folktales are ruled out. It retains, argues Jameson, a ‘*sublated* Science-Fiction [...] both cancelled and preserved all at once’ (1992a, 89-90), and doesn’t rule out the possibility of ‘a mystical religious conspiracy of a suspiciously Slavophile type’ (88), Jameson’s italics). The threat can be read either way, from another, technologically superior planet or from within, the mystical forces rife in village communities. Jameson’s ‘Soviet magic realism’ claims that science fiction and religion are both present and absent in the film; historical fact is represented, yet with gaps. The uncertainty in the film is fourfold: an ideological regime that remains invisible throughout; the disintegration of the town due to causes that seem miraculous; unexplained

⁴⁶ This is taken from a radio interview with Boris Strugatsky cited on *The Island of Sokurov* official website (Strugatsky n.d.)

⁴⁷ In the same radio interview, Boris Strugatsky argues that film and novel are separate entities: ‘Those who are into the science fiction of Strugatsky should reconcile themselves to the fact that this film (as well as Tarkovsky’s *Stalker*) is not a screen version of the novel, but a totally independent cinema work of its own value: ‘It is important to note that the main idea of the literary source - the idea of how hard it is for a creative person to live in the world of totalitarian mentality, in the world of unbearable pressure of the authorities - this idea has been picked up by the director and transferred to an absolutely new situation. However, in the film this idea sounds very convincing and makes an even more terrifying impression.’

events that border on believability; and lastly, the poverty, disease and economic isolation that undermine the townsfolk's daily routines.

Alexander Sokurov made his first feature film *The Lonely Voice of Man*, in 1978, but his work gained wider distribution in Russia after 1986, where it was well received by Perestroika-era audiences. His films depict the displacement, liminality, stagnation and economic turmoil that enveloped Soviet peoples, and particularly the peasant classes, as a new era of social change appeared on the horizon. Sokurov treats St Petersburg as his adopted home, but cautions that nationality is not straightforward: 'I myself experience history as a Eurasian; Russia occupies a separate place, being neither Europe nor Asia' (Carels 1991, 73). He refers to himself as a traditionalist, fond of classical rather than contemporary culture; and regards his filmmaking in part as a political effort to address being Russian. But his is a subdued politics that stems as much from literary and painterly influence as direct experience: 'it is imperative to keep it [art] from being stifled by a society in the grips of hatred and disaster' (Sokurov in interview with Sedofsky 2001). Many of Sokurov's films take ideas and motifs from classical literature, theatre and painting; and therefore, present a conceptually synaesthetic form of cinema that is dependent on a variety of media.

As for cinematic influence, he cites Flaherty's ethno-documentary *Nanook of the North* and Eisenstein's *Strike*, the former for its portrayal of ritual using non-actors, and the latter for its 'Russian energy [and a...] senseless, wild, almost animalistic quality' (Carels 1999, 73). These influences are paramount in *Days of Eclipse* where the political status of post-Soviet Turkmenistan, the documentary touches of non-actors and reportage-style segments, and the conflation of animal and human realms contribute to its portrayal of confusion and displacement. Taking his queue from Eisensteinian 'intellectual' montage, Sokurov constructs associative juxtapositions, but keeps them within the frame, rather than between frames. He tends towards a rhythmic exchange between long panoramic shots and long static takes. He creates contemplative time for the spectator to make associations between the many objects and figures inhabiting the space. The composition in *Days of Eclipse* reminds me of Surrealist collage and film in which spectatorial interaction with the seemingly disparate elements – here Malianov

and Vecherovsky's cluttered apartments being good examples - yields new narratives, or events, that extend beyond any conventional narrative arc.

As of 2012, Sokurov has filmed seventeen fiction films and thirty six documentaries (of which many bear the title 'elegy'). However, the highly personal and nationalistic subject matter, and the literary and musical references attest to a style that combines both modes. Sokurov frequently attests to this overlap in interview: 'there's no difference in importance between the two'; they are simply 'just two ways of reaching the same goal: to define my own emotional attitude to the world in a creative way' (Carels 1999, 76). Sokurov's version of the docu-fantasy – the magic realist film - follows a tradition of filmmakers such as Luis Buñuel and Hiroshi Teshigahara who create marvelous and disquieting films from found-footage, newsreels, and surrealist photography, mixing both avant-garde and classical styles. *Days of Eclipse* falls between many poles, aesthetically, culturally, politically and historically. But more importantly, it also falls outside them. Christie defines Sokurov as 'one of the architects of a new aesthetic of marginality' (1988, 14). Certainly his magical works address the theme of being alien, of being cast adrift, in ways that are simply not possible in a single genre film, or for that matter, in a film attributed to a particular historical movement.

Jameson maintains that Sokurov's films re-invent modernism with an 'experimental' technique reminiscent of 'the more extreme and enigmatic literary modernists' such as Ezra Pound and Marcel Duchamp (2006, 1). Here we finally see a list of what Jameson regards to be the components of 'the tendencies of the modernist art cinema', which include 'the long take, slow-motion narrative, a web of allusions, and morbid subject matter' (2006, 2). Hardly a definitive list, these criteria illustrate the insubstantial concept that Jameson is working with, and actually detract from our quest to define an aesthetic cinematic mode. For example, Sokurov's most famous colleague Andrei Tarkovsky's (1932-1986)⁴⁸ films are notoriously known for their long takes and morbid subject matter, and are often described as modernist in their poetic and

⁴⁸ Sokurov, born almost two decades later than Tarkovsky, was helped by the older director to find work at Lenfilm in St Petersburg. They remained friends until Tarkovsky's death in 1986, however, Sokurov remains adamant that his style has never been influenced by Tarkovsky's. For more on their relationship see (A. Sokurov Spring 1999).

symbolic style. Jameson, however, has little time for Tarkovsky's brand of modernism, which he deems elitist. Comparing Sokurov's *Days of the Eclipse* to Tarkovsky's film *Stalker* (1979) (also adapted from a Strugatsky brothers' novel: *Roadside Picnic*, 1971), he argues that where Tarkovsky translates any mysterious elements of the supernatural into modernist symbols and turns the film into a 'religious fable', Sokurov invents a genre that, while retaining elements of earlier modernisms, represents the unrepresentable hybridity characteristic of postmodern art.⁴⁹ According to Jameson, Sokurov's films exude a melancholy for the 'more unique historical destinies of Russia' (2006, 11) which, although also arguably true of Tarkovsky's films, is presented, for Jameson, in a more experimental and less moralistic manner. Robert Bird argues that 'by linking his self-conscious aesthetic anachronism to a lament for Empire [...] Sokurov has gone beyond the conservative avant-gardism of an Andrei Tarkovsky' (Beumers 2007, 90). Significantly, Sokurov's work displays a modernist heritage that moves forward, not toward postmodern style, but to a new aesthetic of montage based on 'marginality', enigma and experiment.

I disagree strongly with Jameson's assessment of Tarkovsky's filmmaking, which, as I will discuss in the conclusion, I feel has equally magic realist aspects, particularly in his autobiographical film *Mirror*, and in *Stalker*, in which affect and the supernatural abound against a *desaturated colour palette*. At this point, I will pause only to illustrate how Jameson's contemporary Slavoj Žižek, takes a completely antithetical view to Jameson's arguing that: 'The typical stance of the Tarkovskian hero on the threshold of a dream is to be on the lookout for something, with the attention of his senses fully focused; then all of a sudden, as if though a magic transsubstantiation, this most intense contact with material reality changes it into a dreamscape' (Žižek 1999, n.p.). Žižek's reading of Tarkovskian science fiction brings us back to the modernists' rejection of Enlightenment philosophy, and to the Surrealist *merveilleux*, where rules are replaced by a deep immersion in concrete material reality for the purpose of reinvesting it with 'spirituality'. By contrast Jameson's finds an overblown sense of religiosity that is far from the magical. Jameson's hasty dismissal is biased and unfair. Although I would agree that Sokurov's films present more challenges and

⁴⁹ For further commentary see Jameson, *History and Elegy in Sokurov* 2006.

conundrums than Tarkovsky's – they, for example, contain less dialogue, less well-defined characters, more extra-diegetic intercutting of found materials and stock footage, less clarity of image reproduction (overexposure, deliberately degraded film stock, shaky hand-held camera), a less melodic or synchronised soundtrack – and deal with a greater range of political issues, this is not true of every single example, it is a generalisation that Jameson chooses to adhere to. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the importance of *Days of Eclipse* as a model for exploring cinematic magic realism. It means, rather, that one should proceed cautiously, mindful of over-generalisations and falsehoods within Jameson's argument.

xix. In the minor key of yellow: existential magic in Alexander Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse*

Vecherovsky: 'We've rejected God, but we still can't stand on our own two feet without some myth-crutch to hold us up' (*A Billion Years before the End of the World*, 1978, 100).



Figure 42: Frame taken from Alexander Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse* (1988)

The film opens onto a vivid orange sky, signalling heat and the solar eclipse to come. This static image is accompanied by extra-diegetic sounds of children's voices, overlaid with a soundtrack of folk music. The image dissolves slowly and is replaced by an aerial tracking shot high above the ground as if from the perspective of an aircraft passenger.

The ground, still tinted orange, is scored with both horizontal and vertical lines – train tracks, roads, borders – reminiscent of the composition in photographs of

railways in Roh's *Foto-Auge*. Against these giant sweeping lines, tiny figures are dotted here and there. The children's voices become louder as the camera swoops down and gains speed. Isolated shacks, rubble, a stationary bus, and more figures are now perceivable. The soundtrack changes to an ominous drum beat and the strings crescendo into discordant noise as the camera begins a dizzying plunge towards this unordered geometry. Finally the hurtling descent reaches its end, and we 'crash' with the camera-eye into microscopic particles of dusty, stony ground; immediately the orange filter is replaced by a yellowy sepia tone.



Figure 43: Frame taken from Alexander Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse* (1988)

The opening descent and the discordant extra-diegetic soundtrack frame the supervening montage of 'documentary' style shots of silent townsfolk (played by local non-actors) in strangeness. The non-synchronous audio-montage creates a confusion of voices that lack bodies, and bodies that lack voices. The voices we *can* hear belong to 'beings' that seem to be watching from above. This aerial perspective marks for Jameson the potential presence of a science-fiction genre staple: the spaceship. From the very first scene, the spectator's view of the town is defamiliarised, as he or she literally has to adopt the perspective of a child (signalled by the extra-diegetic laughter) or an alien (if we believe the existence of the spaceship). *Days of Eclipse* embraces 'the representation of the unrepresentable, namely, the forces that impinge on our monad from the outside' (2006, 10), but these forces have no real tangibility except for the affect that is produced. What is particularly striking about this exchange of perspectival positions is that any hierarchy between spectator and object is dismantled. Whereas an ethnographic documentary may present footage of indigenous

peoples to educate the spectator about a culture, thereby setting up the classical hegemonic gaze, Sokurov's film presents a double gaze whereby the 'extraterrestrial' perspective undermines the spectator-object relationship. The gaze becomes uncertain; who is being watched, and why? Despite the camera's unwavering scrutiny of the townsfolk in a montage of close-ups, the suggestion of an alien 'other' questions its origins. The first close-up of a bandaged woman dressed in traditional headscarf and staring listlessly ahead is already imbued with mystery. She is both real (a non-actor from Krasnovodok) and the subject of an unexplained investigation (perhaps of one planet or species by another; or Muslim peasant being observed by government officials.)

The shots that follow (all in yellowed sepia tones) establish a small rural town and its inhabitants: a woman walking through ruined stone houses with a dog, men squatting on the dusty floor covered in flies, and endless sheets of washing hanging out to dry. This montage is interrupted by a scene of camels shot in close-up, slowly chewing. The intrusive, voyeuristic close-ups of the town then continue, revealing a man with rotting teeth, a youth rocking back and forth, and children playing in the rubble – the human detritus of the town. Nothing is new, almost everything looks ruined or half-finished and even the children seem ill and weary. Many of the men and women stare directly back at the camera; some grin and others seem indifferent, they all appear to be waiting, or killing time.



Figure 44: Frame taken from Alexander Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse* (1988)

Although there is a corporeal verisimilitude to these people, the yellow tone renders them otherworldly and even 'mutant' as Jameson puts it. The townsfolk

appear destined to shuffle through a life of repetitive gestures. They live in ostensible fear of the authorities, or of being forced to move to another place, or of sickness and natural disasters – the exact source is never made apparent. It does not escape Jameson’s attention that these images bear an intense likeness to the ‘sinister’ documentary footage of the starving and diseased Hurdanos in Luis Buñuel’s *Las Hurdes* [aka *Tierra sin pan*, or *Land without Bread*, Spain, 1933]) in which ‘the surrealist camera, primed for the libidinal image, records the stark desolation of a culture of malnutrition and premature mortality’ (1992a, 96). Both directors deliberately mis-match image and sound, and intercut images to create contrast and intensity. As Vivian Sobchack notes, ‘*Las Hurdes* is deeply political (rather than merely partisan) in that its primary aim is to cause the viewer to question the very bases of perception itself’ (Sobchack, 73). Jameson’s description of the impoverished inhabitants as ‘a population of in-bred genetic freaks and mutants going about their incomprehensible business’ (1992a, 93) recalls the ‘cretins’ of Buñuel’s film. He reads the diegetic world of *Days of Eclipse* as a colonised space, where material conditions have deteriorated to such an extent that both human subject and dusty, ruined landscape are one – a caricature, an exaggerated ‘pathology of the visual’ (93). However, thanks to the uncertain presence of a civilisation beyond the diegetic space, and also to Sokurov’s eye for strange minutiae, there is a heightened atmosphere of unreality.

Sokurov’s vision of the East in which ‘all are one way or another transplanted into an alien ethnocultural and ecological environment’ (Turovskaya 1989, 112), a ‘thick, international soup’ (Moskvina 1998, 118), is a less positive view of hybridity than Carpentier’s portrayals of indigenous, African, European and mestizo communities. Although some have been critical of Sokurov’s portrayal⁵⁰, he explains how this sense of place springs from his own experience in childhood: ‘There is no stable, established cultural situation here, everything is mixed up [...] Not a single one of the national groups has the chance of realising itself fully here in its spiritual, national substance’ (Graffy 2011, 77). In my

⁵⁰ Russian critic Tatyana Moskvina is critical of Sokurov’s Turkmenistan, pointing out the quantity of stereotypes that have been bundled together: ‘There are a myriad of images, archetypes, and miniscenes inserted into the film instead of a singular image that would have concentrated the full flavor of the East and penetrated the memory forever’ (Moskvina 1994).

opinion such criticism is clearly unfounded as Sokurov not only employs a quite obvious level of irony regarding these stereotypes, but is highly sensitive to the plight of Turkmenistan's displaced communities (as Vecherovsky's dialogue on his ancestry indicates). My feeling after watching the film was one of incredulity, not at a clumsy personification of its subjects, but of the unbelievable realities brought about through a system of Soviet totalitarianism. Sokurov represents his childhood home with deeply underscored and deliberate gestations towards its unreality. Unexpected juxtapositions between pre-modern and modern elements, and the artificiality of the real location – Sokurov's sound technician Vladimir Persov testifies that filming in Krasnovodsk 'was like an "artificial" place' (2011, 208) – test the spectator's belief in what she sees.



Figure 45: Frame taken from Alexander Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse* (1988)

It is of the utmost importance to its categorisation as a piece of magical realist cinema that *Days of Eclipse* is set in a region where origin, nationhood, and ethnicity are in question. As is often the case in the literature of a colonising nation, the indigenous peoples of Turkmenistan were written off as 'backward' prior to imperial Russia's seizure of power (completed in 1894 and not fully dissolved until 1991, three years after the release of *Days of Eclipse*). After the Second World War the Soviet political police NKVD (Peoples Commissariat of Internal Affairs) exiled and targeted Muslim nationalities throughout the Soviet Union, sending them to rural areas such as Turkmenistan: 'These brutal forced relocations to desolate areas with poor material conditions resulted in hundreds of deaths' from disease and malnutrition (Pohl 2000). Sokurov's film makes emphatic reference to its many ethnic groups; and in addition gives voice to the

Crimean Tartars and Volga Germans. A geologist named Vecherovsky, the only true friend of the main character, the young doctor Malianov, tells how his parents, exiled under Stalin, were for many years unable to find permanent residency and never found a sense of 'home'. This vast human suffering has for Jameson a depth that offers an 'immediate historical fascination' for the viewer even though such stories are part of a larger repetitive cycle (107). But Sokurov is always keen to introduce irony into his shots, and contrasts the ancient shuffling townsfolk with the Russian 'outsider' Malianov, who has infiltrated their town with his big city ideas.

Malianov, who Jameson describes as resembling a Fullbright research student – blonde, healthy, full of curiosity and rebellion – is quite dogmatic in his disparagement of the townsfolk. He admits to not being able to understand a word they say, talks about their illnesses to others, and comments: 'It's like living in a freaking wildlife reserve', a typical example of Sokurov's direct use of irony. The shot of the chewing camels in the first montage sequence (an absurd Buñuelian touch), the recurring dog motif⁵¹ and the constant presence of animals and insects render the town a zoo. Even gifts of food given to Malianov – a lobster in aspic and an unskinned rabbit – remain grotesque in their original form.



Figure 46: Frame taken from Alexander Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse* (1988)

⁵¹ Some of the townsfolk keep dogs, Malianov's friend Vecherovsky looks after (and subsequently kills) his friends' dog and we see a half-exposed canine skeleton in the town cemetery. Jameson refers to Luis Buñuel's documentary *Las Hurdes*, which documents the stark reality of malnutrition and mortality in a remote Mexican mountain village, in his reading of *Days of Eclipse*. However, we should also recall that in Buñuel's *los olvidados*, the image of a stray dog haunts the main character Jaibo.

Alongside them men and women, largely without dialogue, shuffle aimlessly, appearing almost exclusively in exterior shots, whereas the animals often appear inside the houses, even buried alongside humans in the cemetery. There is no logical order, no dominant hierarchy, as boundaries, like the town itself, are slowly being eroded. Malianov tells his visiting sister: 'There's nothing to spend their money on. Some require a bare minimum, like their nomadic ancestors. Others mimic what they see on TV. Although in these conditions it always fails'. The gap between the historical past and the postmodern era of global television is as yet too great to be overcome, as are the differences between the different ethnic communities.

Vecherovsky warns Malianov that: 'No matter what you do, you'll always be branded an outsider.' But this 'outsider' perspective becomes the indirect narrative catalyst for an exploration of the political, religious and cultural issues at stake in Turkmenistan, and the implied post-Soviet world. We never see representatives of the government (save for a group of soldiers) or witness conversations between political figures and the townsfolk. However, it is implicit in the fear and 'mutual pressure' that Sokurov sets out to portray (Graffy 2011, 77). Ultimately, the film's portrayal of clashing cultural traditions and an inherent sense of alienation and loss emphasises that the negative aspects are imposed from without, by the Soviet system; the film is not critical of the cultural hybridity as a dilution of national identity.

Days of Eclipse combines a sequence of episodes without causal progression or logical conclusion. It follows Malianov, who has moved to rural Turkmenistan to escape the intellectual pressures of his research in Moscow. He lives in a squalid ground-floor apartment strewn with the fluttering pages of his obsessively abundant notes on the relation between juvenile hypertension and religious beliefs; the apartment also doubles as his makeshift surgery. Malianov acts as our intermediary, but the narrative is not focalised through him. Rather the sequential episodes unfold tangentially, sometimes directly connected to him, and sometimes loosely linked by association. Malianov gradually becomes forced to act as subject in the paranoid theatre of his friends and neighbours, but his actions offer no coherence. The fact that his actions have no logical conclusions, and that everyone is merely acting out whilst trying to control their terrifying

fantasy of the 'outside' world, seems to me Surrealist. Sokurov deliberately breaks any logical chains of causality between events; in one sequence a neighbour's pet snake and an iguana repeatedly turn up at Malianov's apartment to no consequence, and the mother of a boy who keeps swallowing needles finds that they do not show up on an x-ray, they simply disappear into his body. Such seemingly irrational interruptions permeate the film, penetrating its filmy, dusty diegesis without causing the narrative to progress or change direction – they correspond to Roh's visual representation of the human imagination as vertical rays, and the Spinozan moment of Wonder that draws the strange affect of the irrational into the realm of the real.

Jameson notes that the moment of affect can also be brought about in cinematic magic realism through a clash of artificiality and historic authenticity in the anachronism. For example, the uber-blonde doctor's contemporary uniform of jeans and T-shirt makes the tattered clothes of the Turkmen appear even shabbier; his clothes seem anachronistic and ridiculously out of place. Jameson points to anachronisms in film as being 'magical'. An extraneous object or unfitting style in a particular setting can mimic the effect of multi-layered and multi-spatial narrative in magic realist fiction. A 1950s car in a nineteenth century drama would suspend two separate time periods within the same narrative without the establishing device of the flashback. In a magic realist narrative there would be no distinction between the two, and they would be able to coexist within the same temporality, without any authorial interference as explanation. However, in Sokurov's films, anachronisms do not function in the same way.



Figure 47: Frames taken from Alexander Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse* (1988)

For example, the exercise bicycle in Malianov's apartment, graffiti proclaiming 'SPEAK, DISCO, ROCK', or the refrain from Disney's *Three Little Pigs* in the penultimate scene, are not historically inaccurate for the time, but they seem out of place in a peasant village in Turkmenistan. In a scene depicting a local singing contest the contemporary graffiti on a wall behind the participants, clashes with the traditional melody that we hear. Jameson's entire theory of the political unconscious and of cinematic magic realism actually spins around the idea of anachronism, for the 'transhistorical', in which older cultures alternatively converge or are at odds with the new, will always contain styles and objects that are both in and out of fashion. This chimes with Robert Bird's description of Sokurov's 'anachronistic' style of filming, above, which notes how the director manages to 'disrupt' historical time by making his presence, or the presence of a camera, felt. Indeed, Sokurov's often jarring choices of effects such as unsteady focus, unnatural colourisation, or sudden extra-diegetic noise are obvious

interruptions, or intrusions that signal the temporality of the film in production, rather than that of the historical period being re-enacted on screen. In *Days of Eclipse*, which was filmed close to the period it depicts, the anachronism is in the gap between ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ culture. For Jameson an object bears the signs (or the waning of the signs) of its production, and is therefore in itself capable of signalling an entire cultural period. He is intrigued by the ‘magic-realist anachronisms’ in a scene depicting a famous Renaissance artist works on a motorcycle in Derek Jarman’s *Caravaggio* (1986) (1998, 125), a common motif in Jarman’s films, in which disparate temporal realms appear to exist side-by-side as if they are each part of a contemporaneous reality.

It is significant that Sokurov, too, uses art historical references to underscore anachronistic temporality in many of his films, most spectacularly in *Russian Ark* (2002), the film that he wished to shoot in one take, as if ‘in one breath’ (in deliberate contrast to the Eisensteinian model of Soviet montage). Sokurov’s ‘magic realist history’⁵² demonstrates the 36 rooms of St Petersburg’s State Hermitage Museum and 300 years of Russian history in 90 minutes of ‘real time’⁵³. Sokurov has argued in interview that history can be represented in any object, whether detailed or hazily etched, and that it can also easily be embodied by a character. However, he stresses that historicity must always exist on the same level as every other theme or concern represented in a film (Sedofsky, 3), which supports Jameson’s argument that disruption or time slippage, when it happens, belongs to the here and now, to the explosive present.

Birgit Beumers refers to the cinematic journey through the Hermitage Museum as a ‘virtual journey’ (Beumers 2011a, 178) conducted by an ‘invisible’ narrator (ventriloquised by Sokurov). The second narrator is that of the real historical figure Astolphe, Marquis de Custine who visited Russia in 1839. Custine’s walk through the museum space spans some 300 years, beginning with the time of Peter the Great and ending with Nicholas II. During his visit he encounters

⁵²David Shengold refers to the film as ‘a magic realist history of his [Sokurov’s] adoptive city, St Petersburg’ but does not elaborate more on this matter in his article, “Grandmother’s Courage: Indomitable Opera Diva takes on Sokurov’s ‘Alexandra’”, http://www.cinemaguild.com/homevideo/ess_alexandra.htm accessed 12/03/2011

⁵³ The film, naturally, was not made in 90 minutes and required both rehearsal and post-production editing to ‘control’ the 867 costumed actors, and to erase mistakes. See (Alaniz 2011, 153-175). See also (Beumers 2011 [2011a]) which argues that although the film may have been recorded digitally in one take, it was ultimately fragmented into separate reels for projection.

various costumed figures – fictionalised portrayals of famous Russian leaders and diplomats – , some visitors in contemporary costume, some smelling of formaldehyde, and others clearly phantoms. Some interact with him, and others pass him by as if he were not there. There is insufficient space to go into detail here, but nevertheless, Sokurov's film is magic realist in its manipulation of narrative temporality and history, a history, indeed, with gaps. It presents the 300 years as existing coterminously within the same 90 minutes of diegetic time, condensed for maximum affect. Custine is present throughout, and the film 'magically' permits him to view persons and paintings that could not possibly have existed when he was alive. Made after Jameson's essay, I wonder whether the critic would have found the film overly sentimental or nostalgic, as he does Tarkovsky's major works. I find that *Russian Ark* strengthens the case for Sokurov as magic realist, as it displays the avant-garde technicality, oneirism, geo-political concerns and layered temporality described at various stages in each of Roh, Carpentier, and Jameson's 'manifestos'. As with *Days of Eclipse*, *Russian Ark* orchestrates a spectatorial gaze that must negotiate extraordinary events which subtly connect the political to the personal.

xx. An aesthetics of cinematic magic realism

Sokurov is renowned for his desaturated colour palette and nowhere in his filmography is this more pronounced than in *Days of Eclipse*. The desert setting, the heat and the spectacle of a solar eclipse – the profound reversal of day and night, the cosmological wonders that inspired Roh – assume a similarly dull palette of yellows and browns to those of the films discussed in 'On magic realism'. Jameson describes this monochromatic tendency using Roh's term 'minor key', seeing the deliberate desaturation as a particularly Soviet response to the garish 'image culture of postmodernism' (1992a, 97). Various hues of yellow: sepia, saffron, and sickly ochre, the aged yellow of newsprint, desert sand, and golden brown, cover the town and its surroundings in what Jameson calls a 'dusty' veil or filter. In what I term a 'collage' effect (in that it appears overlaid, an additional layer of material substance that appears to transform the images), Sokurov partially obscures our view of the town with dusty swathes of airborne particles, and with overexposed shots that capture the strength of the sunlight.

In *Days of Eclipse* I note the ‘visionary legacy of *sfumato*’ (Sedofsky, 2001) – the evaporation of harsh outlines in smoky, atmospheric effect made famous in German Expressionism - which obfuscates the ontological world before us, rendering certain aspects unfamiliar and mysterious. Mists, dust clouds and fogs are also visual metaphors for the mind, for consciousness. In Sokurov’s poetic tribute to French eighteenth-century landscape artist *Hubert Robert: A Fortunate Life* (1996), for example, swathes of mist accompany the voice-over narration, a visual accompaniment to the stream of consciousness. As we listen to Sokurov’s voiceover, the images move from scenes of a traditional Japanese *noh* play to close-ups of a selection of Robert’s paintings of ruined buildings and landscapes. Paraphrasing a quote from Dostoevsky, the narrator reminds the spectator how easy it is to slip in and out of real and imaginary worlds ‘As I peered at this miracle [...] without noticing how it came about, I found myself in another land’. Simultaneously, the transition from *noh* play to paintings is made through cuts that appear seamlessly blended due to their partial obfuscation from the effect of white and pink mists. Lauren Sedofsky’s suggests to Sokurov in interview that this visual technique is an ‘air of art’, to which he responds: ‘Fog, smoke, vapor, and gliding movement distance the viewer from the overly sharp quality of the screen reality [...] It should be possible for information to be concealed or for the entire image to be gradually withdrawn [...] There is no true visual work without mystery’ (Sedofsky, 2002). Sokurov uses the effect to blend between the real *noh* performance and the still paintings so that each seems both static and animated. In *Days of Eclipse* the dusty veil that Sokurov introduces to filter the landscape of Turkmenistan makes the demarcations between people and objects seem to slowly disappear.



Figure 48: Frame taken from Alexander Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse* (1988)

Sokurov's dull yellows evoke a heat that absorbs rather than gives energy, smothering the porous, parched earth. These shades are far from the active and bright yellow that 'moves towards the spectator [...] spreads beyond boundaries and causes an object to burst forth' (Kandinsky 1946, 63). In direct contrast, illness, decay, and the fading of time are suggested in the corresponding images of cracked and dry layers of earth. Rather than bouncing off glossy surfaces, the sunlight appears to disappear, absorbed by the porous rocks and worn concrete walls, which, often shown in medium close-up, seem hostile and unyielding. Sokurov weaves metonymic associations that link such shots to the over-riding atmosphere of claustrophobia and paranoia. At times over-exposed shots in close-up give the impression of an enclosed, claustrophobic space, at other points static long shots of the landscape are cropped to avoid any symbolic reading of a nostalgic or utopian horizon. The camera moves from exterior to interior via the use of dissolves: walls and partitions serve no purpose and everything has a vague relational proximity. Sokurov often employs stationary framing, opting for an objective perspective that explores the material relations between the characters and their environment. The film focuses on objects within houses, the houses within the landscape, and the landscape as part of a planetary system. The layering persists in the interior scenes of Malianov's apartment, which is a collage in itself. Every surface is covered by books, papers, gifts, medical equipment and ephemera, and each object is testament to a historical past, 'the articulated superposition of whole layers of the past within the present' (1986a, 191).



Figure 49: Frame taken from Alexander Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse* (1988)

Texture as well as tonality, is an essential component of Sokurov's entropic world. In *Days of Eclipse* close-up shots of magnified cracks in the earth take on the appearance of Ernst's painted frottages and grattages, (such as *Totem and Taboo*, 1941) in which the relief seems artificial, as if painted onto the ground in thick gouache, or overlaid with swatches of material. The close-up view disorients the spectator; we might as well be on the moon. Abandoned, unfinished building projects, and crumbling stucco walls give an air of impermanence to the town, which, added to the overall impression of poverty, resemble Vittorio de Sica's shanty town in *Miracle in Milan* and Buñuel's imaginary slum in *los olvidados*.



Figure 50: Frame taken from Alexander Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse* (1988)

Often the diegetic world is expanded by intercutting close-ups of art objects depicting exterior scenes: a ceramic plate with an illustration of a ruined

building, old sepia photographs of the town showing rows of Muslim men in turbans, or old colonial-style grand houses.

In addition, Sokurov plays with perspective, foreshortening shots of the distant mountains so our spatial sense is disoriented. Robert Bird notes how the director often uses an anamorphic lens to widen the landscape (2011, 91). As a result, sharpness is lost, and the stretched, distorted image appears out of focus or smeared. The lack of clarity transforms Turkmenistan into an indistinct and otherworldly space, and Sokurov plays on this ‘artificiality’. He adds unusual perspective, challenging our expectations of scale: long shots sometimes render human life microscopic; and low-angle shots create overly large figures or objects that dwarf their surroundings. Halfway through the film when the eclipse occurs, the sun and moon loom gigantic against a backdrop of mountainous rock that is made to seem as artificial as Murnau’s quasi-theatrical sets in *Sunrise*. In the final scene, it is the town rather than nature that succumbs to complete entropy, as the buildings disappear from the screen in a gradual dissolve that leaves an eerily uninhabited space.



Figure 51: Frame taken from Alexander Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse* (1988)

Jameson’s insistence on the psychological and material qualities of affect in cinematic magic realism privileges the link between sight and subjective response, but it also suggests a synaesthetic quality (the delicious green) in which sensory confusion plays a part. The overlap of images and sounds, for example, replicates the mental capacity to simultaneously recall visual, textural, olfactory or aural memories. I, for example, felt somewhat confused during the opening

sequence in which the camera makes its vertiginous descent at a dizzying pace, accompanied by childish shrieks and laughter. The eventual ‘crash’ is both literal and emotional, leaving the spectator in a state of the complete unknown as sound and image are disconnected. Eisenstein, himself prone to the neurological condition of synaesthesia, believed that in certain artists the senses interact, potentially causing disruption and a sense of disorientation. In his famed article ‘Towards a theory of montage’, he notes how some patients suffering from synaesthesia are unable to walk across multi-coloured carpets without stumbling. Such a patient ‘perceives the polychrome patterns of the carpet as though they were actually at different depths or heights’ (Eisenstein 1991, 259). In *Days of Eclipse* the landscape, like Eisenstein’s rug, is difficult to navigate. Its indeterminate spaces create optical illusions in which shadows, folds and fissures create the effect of mountains and planes. As in *Fever* and *Condores*, the occasional flash of uncannily bright colour of native costumes in the otherwise desaturated vista seems alien and unnatural. Moreover, the dislocation of sound from image creates a constant uncertainty about the reality of what is seen and heard.

Jameson does not discuss the role of sound in cinematic magic realism, but it undoubtedly adds to the mysterious atmosphere in *Days of Eclipse*. The film’s soundtrack is layered with a cacophony of non-synchronous sounds: extra-diegetic voices, the persistent sounds of typing and ringing telephones in Malianov’s apartment, folk music, an original score, radio broadcasts of religious and political events, and odd shrieks and bangs. Sound bridges shots long after the initial image has faded, or anticipates an action that occurs seconds later. Furthermore, Persov notes that Sokurov likes to use ‘real’ sound in order to create a more poignant emotional affect in scenes where artifice is deliberately foregrounded (2011). For example, in a scene in which a young boy mysteriously appears, weak and freezing cold, at Malianov’s doorstep, the boy’s strange chatter is set against a radio broadcast of an Italian mass that can be dated precisely to 1987.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ See Julian Grafy, (in Beumers 2011, 79) in which he describes how in the broadcast, the priest makes reference to the beatification of Edith Stein in 1987, a nun who died in a Nazi concentration camp.

As a metaphor for ethnic dislocation, paranoia, intellectual threat, and existential malaise, the cinematic synaesthesia that Sokurov creates becomes magical because the dislocation results either in a heightened sense of the real or in an imagined extra-diegetic space *beyond* (but metaphorically tied to) what is actually seen on screen (the extraterrestrial ‘other world’). The syncretic blending of sensation puts into question what can be thought to be ‘real’. This operates at various levels: as we have already noted, members of the crew and Sokurov himself felt a certain distance from the ‘artificiality’ of the people and buildings thrown together in Krasnovodsk; on screen many of the characters appear dazed or shaken; Sokurov manipulates the image to make the diegetic world seem even more unstable and intransient; and finally the spectator reacts with affect to the jarring non-verisimilitude of the film. *Days of Eclipse* presents a mysterious object world that creates what has been described as an ‘altered consciousness’ (Totaro 2000, np). Donato Totaro likens Sokurov’s filmmaking to Surrealist art that ‘rekindles the object in a new light’ (2000). Ultimately Sokurov strips away the comfortable layers of known experience, of recognisable images and sounds, and replaces them with a dusty, distorted refraction. We may feel that we are standing on quicksand, or on Eisenstein’s rug, trying to make sense of the strange contingencies and the paranoid actions of the characters. Yet the earthquake tremors really do cause the earth to move, and the eclipse which ‘reverses’ the perception of day and night is a naturally-occurring phenomenon. Sokurov cleverly combines the real with *trompe l’oeil* and chance events to create an incredibly mysterious tension that is suggestive of a nightmare, and thus brings us back to the question of ‘something else’ beyond representation – the half-formed idea emerging from within the fog. The following section examines four key episodes in the film that reveal the ‘something else’ that Jameson is grasping at, what he actually means by ‘magic’ in his definition of cinematic magic realism.

xxi. Supernatural magic? Marvellous events.

We have established that Jameson’s definition of magic realism stems from Carpentier’s prologue on the Latin American marvellous, recalling Carpentier’s assertion that: ‘Everything strange, everything amazing, everything that eludes established norms is marvelous’ (1995, 101). Cross-cut between scenes depicting

the slow daily reality of the townsfolk, the scenes in which Malianov appears often seem fantastic by comparison. In particular there are four corresponding to Jameson's event that dissolve ontological boundaries. Each event resonates with a hyperreal clarity that has the glass-like quality of *magsischer realismus* paintings. Hyperreality, we may recall, is attributed to the Neue Sachlichkeit aim 'to suggest the mystery of the unconscious mind by translating the most usual objects into sentimental terms, into forms as bizarre, as disturbing, as melancholy, as tragic and nightmare-like as possible'.⁵⁵ In *Days of Eclipse* the luminosity and brightness in certain scenes exchanges what Jameson terms the 'yellow, dusty filter' (1992a, 96) for a more highly pigmented colour that I find reminiscent of the golden beams in religious painting and the unnatural illumination in magic realist painting. Each of the four scenes, described in the order of their occurrence in the film, contributes to a growing sense of the marvellous that seems to be connected in some way to the natural power of the eclipse, emphasising aspects of life that Malianov cannot comprehend.

In the first of these episodes during the night before the eclipse, Malianov's Russian neighbour calls Malianov to his house under the pretext of procuring a sleeping pill for his insomnia. He, like Malianov, writes, but is preoccupied by the idea that he should not be writing at all. He appears uneasy and paranoid. The two men are shown frontally lit, their backs to the exterior view, looking into the apartment, which in turn is framed against the black night sky. The frontal lighting eliminates shadow giving an unnaturally flat image with minimal depth.

⁵⁵ This definition of hyperrealism is taken from Maurice Raynal, 1928, *Modern French Painters*.



Figure 52: Frame taken from Alexander Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse* (1988)

From this angle the moon appears excessively low in the sky, hanging stony and out of place, recalling the weird meeting of rock, cloud and moon in Magritte's *La Bataille de l'Argonne* [*Battle of the Argonne*, 1959). The high contrast between the pale stucco moon, Malianov's white shirt and bare chest, and the black night sky is characteristically magic realist. Moreover, on closer inspection, the buildings and yard in the background, only partially reflecting the light and scored by a black power line, bear a striking resemblance to Roh's photonegative prints in which the expected light patterns have been inverted. The low, unrealistic moon and the artificial frontal lighting source transform a very ordinary tableau shot into something quite mysterious.

After a short exchange of dialogue, the camera follows Malianov as he walks out into a clear, ultra-blue light, made possible by presence of the lunar orb just as the sun is setting⁵⁶, but which nonetheless shocks the spectator after the monochromatic colour design of the balcony scene. The camera then zooms outwards and upwards until the houses are once again the size of small toys (Roh also found the transformation of an object's scale – whether made gigantic or miniature – to have a magic realist effect). Suddenly a beam of light passes overhead, sweeping back and forth through the houses, and we see that mysterious green lights are glowing in several houses. These do not emanate from a natural light source, but could arguably be linked to the extraterrestrial

⁵⁶ This event is of cosmological and religious significance to Muslims, and is marked during Ramadan in the Islamic calendar.

presence in the film's opening scene. The next shot matches the movement of the sweeping beam as Malianov is revealed back inside his apartment swinging the light bulb hanging from his bedroom ceiling. We hear his sister ask: 'Are you afraid?' to which he answers: 'Yes, I am.' Both exterior and interior scenes are imbued with a peculiar tension; the white light of the beam, and the golden yellow light of the bulb, however, cannot be deemed more or less artificial or marvellous than the startling dusk sky and the summer moon. We cannot tell if Malianov is afraid of his foreign environment, his conversation with Snegovoy, or the threat of external forces, but the fear is transmitted in the visual representation.

The following morning Snegovoy is discovered dead in his own apartment, and the forensic investigation gradually reveals the objects related to his suicide. The police search lasts for five minutes and six seconds of screen time, and the body of the dead man, unceremoniously shrouded in a white sheet with his leg sticking out, is present in the background throughout. Time lapse dissolves indicate that this process took much longer, and the number of police swells and dwindles as the futile photographing of the crime scene and filtering of Snegovoy's past is carried out.



Figure 53: Frame taken from Alexander Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse* (1988)

Snegovoy's suicide becomes a painful cataloguing of 'uneventful' forensic time in which the police officers' shuffle through his abandoned possessions (Doane, 2002). However, for Jameson this slow event builds intensity; Snegovoy's room poses an enigma, and the critic experiences the five minutes and six seconds with

‘rapt fascination’ as the consequences of the Russian’s suicide are never disclosed (1992a, 103). Jameson’s reading of the scene can be better understood, I believe, with recourse to an earlier article in which he dissects the role of boredom as a symptom of a more deeply buried malaise: ‘boredom [...] marks the spot in which something painful is buried, it invites us to reawaken all the anguished hesitation, the struggle of the subject to avert his or her eyes from the thought’ (1975, 4). Doane’s ‘uneventful’ time, the drawn-out investigation, thus becomes the site of excavation, inviting the spectator to look beneath and beyond the uncomfortable tedium and unceremonious actions of the police.

After the police investigation, and almost half-way through the film, a shadow passes across the town in another sweeping aerial tracking shot. The eclipse hilal where the moon is almost obscuring, or ‘eating’ the sun features on the flag of Turkmenistan and is of profound religious significance to Muslims. A cosmic metaphor for the sun at midnight, it ‘describes the state of spiritual realisation where day or solar consciousness enters the darkest realms of sleep’⁵⁷ and the polarity of night and day is reversed. It has been suggested that the prophet Muhammad may have seen an eclipse which signified his ability to bridge the sleeping and waking worlds, a fitting myth for a magic realist film. In addition, and this is of principle significance to what happens in the morgue scene, is the Islamic belief that an eclipse forewarns the Hour of Doom, or the Day of Resurrection. Although this ‘spiritual’ reading is not developed in the film, the cosmological implication of reversing night and day is extended to Malianov, who, immediately after the eclipse has passed, replaces his white (day) t-shirt with a black (night) one.

In the scene following the eclipse, Malianov stands at his window sill, lit with a champagne luminosity that recalls the silvery-gold patina of early daguerreotypes; momentarily the dusty sepia is replaced and he seems transformed. In one of the narrative’s most inexplicable touches, he performs a back flip off the sill back into his room before heading straight to the morgue. Snegovoy’s body has been spread out on a slab, underneath a bright overhead light. Malianov enters and stands transfixed as the head of the dead man turns slowly towards him. At

⁵⁷ For more information on Muslim tradition regarding the symbolism of an eclipse, see <http://www.theabodeofpeace.com/hilal.html> accessed 22/09/2011

exactly the same moment, an odd, extra-diegetic shriek causes him to jump. Looking up at Malianov, the 'resurrected' Snegovoy implores him to leave: 'The living don't belong here'. At no point is this scene signalled as a figment of Malianov's imagination, and Sokurov does not invest it with any of the cinematic devices usually employed to denote dreams or fantasies such as the slow-motion dream sequence in *los olvidados* (the inexplicable off-screen yell pronouncing 'a fly!', however, is a clashing surrealist intervention). Echoing Magritte's view of representing fantasy and dreams, Tarkovsky maintained that emphasis should always be on the real: 'All too often film dreams are made into a collection of old-fashioned filmic tricks, **and cease to be a phenomenon of life**' (Tarkovsky 1986, 30, emphasis in the original). Likewise Sokurov's portrayal of the resurrected corpse is eerie, but not entirely fantastical. The corpse continues to speak, warning that once the limit between life and death has been truly understood, nothing can ever be the same: 'each one of us has an invisible circle around us and we cannot venture beyond it for even a single moment. Forgetting this limit, trying to break it with your mind [...] you don't know what guardians you have awakened, you have stepped outside the circle'. In Sokurov's *Elegy from Russia* (*[Elegiya iz Rossi]* (1992)) a young woman suggests that she and her companion move away from the dead body of their relative as corpses are said to be able to hear two hours after death. Sokurov does not seem to be inviting the spectator to understand Snegovoy's 'resurrection', but for me it is closer to myth, or folk tale, with a strong tendency towards pagan superstition.

In these scenes we are presented with a series of reversals: black into white, the exchange of night for day, death reversed into a parallel version of life. This intersection of states of being is particular to cinematic magic realism. None are given priority over another in Sokurov's diegetic world, nor given an explanation; the viewer is left to interpret the scenes and make sense of them. Ghosts appear frequently in magical real fiction, often functioning as narrator or advisor, and Snegovoy is both ghost and sage. He exists in a liminal space between life and death, which his speech to Malianov suggests is also the case for the living.

In the next 'supernatural' episode, Malianov's finds a young boy at his doorstep, an unexplained visitor that has been described variously by critics as a

‘prepubescent angel’ (Brashinsky and Horton 1994, 110) or ‘cherub’ (Moskvina 1988, 118), a symptomatic embodiment of the divine rather than the extra-terrestrial (Horton, 2000).



Figure 54: Frames taken from Alexander Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse* (1988)

Unlike the harsh artificial light in the morgue, the scenes in which the boy features are lit softly, and in close-ups of his face a golden light seems to accompany him, transferring to Malianov. Sokurov's young 'angel' suffers from extreme cold despite the desert temperature; he seems wise beyond his years, unlike the street children in previous scenes. His ability to read the future or to ascribe meaning to Malianov's actions is reminiscent of the strange premonitions that Breton writes about in *Nadja*. There is an uncanniness to his certainty that a ringing telephone is for him, or that, without looking, the alligator that often sits outside Malianov's window has returned. His language and manner is that of an adult: he faces Malianov and says: 'I can see as I'm looking at you how your face is getting older', and after reading a page of the doctor's work he hangs his head in silent despair. While he is visiting Malianov, the Italian mass radio broadcast, mentioned above, plays – and for me it represents a synchronic culmination of the 'spirituality' that Sokurov is attempting to create:

I found it [the broadcast] musical, completely angelic; how people speak without repetition [...] The protagonist of *Days of Eclipse* is a Russian who lives in a foreign environment, among Asians and Muslims. Of course, he is going through hard times [...] I became afraid for my protagonist: won't he be too late, won't he miss it,

isn't he too slow? That's why a prayer can be heard, without spiritual connotations

The seeming contingency of the boy's visit and the broadcast of the mass appear to affect Malianov deeply, and he rushes to burn his research papers following this epiphanic episode.



Figure 55: Frame taken from Alexander Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse* (1988)

The 'magical conflagration' of the following scene, what Jameson calls a 'drowning' in fire (perhaps influenced by the Stugatskys' novel in which heat is described as having drowned the town), is the only occasion of 'the supernatural' that Jameson describes in the film (1992a, 105). The fire marks the beginning of an event that ends in a later scene as a grotesque imprint on the wall of Vecherovsky's living room, which Jameson associates with the keloid marks on Snegovoy's mottled face. Thus a series of strange events which are also metaphors for political struggle are linked through a 'spiritual' fire.

Addressing his critics, Sokurov has implied that the 'meaning' of *Days of Eclipse* is revealed in this subsequent scene in Vecherovsky's flat (Graffy, 81). In Malianov's previous visit to the apartment, Vecherovsky explains that he is looking after a dog for some friends. The dog has now vanished, but in its place a hairy black stain is splattered on the living room wall, roughly textured, oozing white goo and still retaining its original canine form.



Figure 56: Frame taken from Alexander Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse* (1988)

In the novel Vecherovsky's apartment is stained with black soot, and it is suggested that the 'authorities' have lit fires there to destroy his work, thus linking ash and soot to the burning of 'intellectual' material. For Jameson what makes the event 'supernatural' is not the extra-terrestrial inflection of the novel, but rather the way in which magic is built up through 'a kind of action at a distance' over two separate episodes (and, for him, the recollection of Snegovoy's face) (1992a, 105) and the self-referential construction of the image itself. Jameson's reading of the stain on Vecherovsky's wall is not connected to politics or to the homo-erotic attraction between these two intellectuals; nor is he particularly concerned about the significance of the dog and the method required to explode it against the wall. 'If I'm not mistaken', Jameson says, 'the charring of the flames unexpectedly translates into a kind of supernatural incineration of Malianov's young colleague's living room walls' (105). Instead he associates this disastrous explosion with Malianov's moment of existential crisis, a crisis that seems to have been exacerbated by the small boy's words, the 'angelic' rhythm of voices of the radio mass that Sokurov describes, and the natural wonder of the eclipse. I find Jameson's explanation compelling, although he misses a possible connection with an earlier scene in which Malianov complains about the town feeling like a zoo. The stain on the wall is the obvious residue of a violent event (Vecherovsky's erupting rage), the charred remains of an animal that ironically enacts Malianov's frustrations in a physical catharsis. It plays out the animal/human dichotomy and also repeats Malianov's gesture of burning his

papers (thus by association, an enactment of the destruction of his ideological ideas).

Days of Eclipse arguably refuses any traditional process of interpretation, rather, as Jameson puts it, these images: 'draw attention to [their] own conditions of possibility' (1992a, 106) He ignores any speculation regarding the divine or other Turkmen superstitions. His one ascription of the supernatural to cinematic technique illustrates how he views magic realism *aesthetically*. Here it becomes clear that the 'fantastic' potential Roh attributes to unusual perspective also works for cinematic magic realism. Sokurov's film is filled with details and events that underscore the irrationality of Malianov's experiences and are left unexplained, but in the same way that flashes and beams of light illuminate the Turkmen landscape in certain scenes, these cumulatively contribute to the visual metamorphosis. In addition to the Surrealist shock and humour of the unexplained mess on the wall, the associative connection that draws the flames of the fire and the hairy stain together suggests the transformation of the object typical of Jameson's definition of movement in magic realist events. The destructive force behind each is contained in the image itself, partially abstracted, and yet related to its context at a distance. Eisenstein's dialectical montage creates juxtapositions in which the political message is easily understood (animal slaughter juxtaposed with the attack on the workers by the Cossacks; or the squeezing of an orange juxtaposed with the encirclement of the workers in *Strike*, for example). While this is also the case in *Days of Eclipse*, the dynamism is less easy to follow in montage sequences that are syncopated and elliptical, in which everything is measured against *impressions* of paranoia and entropy rather than through logical association. Sokurov's style corresponds to what Christian Metz has referred to in his analysis of the movements of condensation and displacement in the non-metaphorical/metonymic juxtaposition of film images as 'the spilling over of the image' (1983, 289). Sokurov's film is dialectical, yet like Buñuel, he imbues the ontological world with affect that is dependent upon irrational or unexpected, seemingly unlinked intersections. 'Magical' ruptures in linear narrativity disrupt straightforward historical documentation. They represent excessive acts that have been taken out of historical chronology and reconfigured *as* image. The flames and the stain are

shown in close-up, ‘multiple transfer’ images that are ‘enigmatic enough to suggest methodological as well as libidinal after-images’ (1992a, 105). They open up unlimited possibility for associative remembering, dreaming and fantasy. Throughout the film Sokurov carefully juxtaposes various representations of history – the police investigation, ethnographic-style portraits, a soldier dressed in a panama hat reading *The Guardian*, a teacher showing old pictures of the town – in visual parataxis. The political and cultural histories are layered one over the other in mysterious rather than radically ideological or nostalgic fashion. The impact of cinematic magic realism therefore lies in the filmmaker’s ability to invest the object world with a palpable mystery or wonder, to connect disparate histories through the present continuous ‘event’ of a particular image. In Sokurov’s film the ambiguity of the present, of a strange object world, and its relation to past and future underscores, for Jameson, the future threat of capitalism to national and cultural identity within the former Soviet Union.

The social reality of post-Soviet migration and oppression presented in Sokurov’s version of late 1980s Turkmenistan is presented as a hybrid aesthetic that draws on several key influences: the science-fiction genre, the avant-garde film, the ethnographic film and classical narrative cinema, but Jameson only really addresses the science-fiction elements while vaguely alluding to the avant-garde nature of Sokurov’s oeuvre. As in critical responses to magic realist literature, magic realism can only seem to exist when measured against these neighbouring genres and yet its status as a new mode rests in the synthesis of elements taken from them. The magical aspect must necessarily mirror the multi-faceted nature of reality as a composite force of antithetical elements, and if this complex balance is achieved, the magic remains a believable part of lived experience. Sokurov’s film, for Jameson, constitutes cinematic magic realism because the elements of the surreal and the absurd, and of the science fiction futurist fantasy, are subsumed by the reality and transformed into something else without becoming detached from that everyday reality. The mysterious element of magic realism, then, descends, it works on the characters from outside: an outside which is ‘inaccessible yet constantly makes its presence felt as pressure and as strangeness’ (2006, 7), and has as much a Rohian as a Carpentierian influence. Jameson never fully defines the ‘something else’ at the edge of magic realism, it

remains as effluence, ‘escaped’ affect as Massumi would have it, an uncontrolled and unlimited intensity produced in the attraction and reaction between interior thought to objective reality. What links Sokurov to earlier filmmakers such as Buñuel, Cocteau, Man Ray, Leger, or Richter, is a shared commitment to the rendering of social modernisation through visual abstraction (in the case of Richter in particular) and associative montage (between or within frames as discussed above). Added to this is the imperative to make visible the functioning of thought, those things that Breton, cited above, begins to see and those ‘that *are not visible*’, like the invisible source of the ‘submarine light’ in Aragon’s *Paris Peasant*. These filmmakers each construct fractured, non-chronological, irrational or condensed images that signify the non-linear, non-rational mechanics of the human mind. The aim is to re-present concrete social reality as it appears and is felt through the human senses, and to illustrate this transformation of the object world as *perceived reality* on screen. Sokurov explains that there are two particular difficulties facing him in achieving this: firstly that:

It's hard to combine film and philosophy. Philosophy is a hyper-abstraction, a cosmic abstraction, film is still just hyperreal

and secondly:

I live in a culture which is not formed, which remains uncompleted, which is out of joint, intertwined with socio-political processes, transitions of power, with the stupidity of the people, their mistakes and crimes (Sokurov 2011, n.p.).

This admission, in my opinion, answers the questions raised by Jameson’s methodological approach to cinematic magic realism. It ties philosophy – thought – to the cosmological sense of wonder and abstraction expressed in Roh’s writings; it places cinema as the apparatus that reflects, augments and enhances the hyperreality of a given reality; it underscores the uneven spread of capitalism and its geopolitical consequences for communities; and lastly it reiterates the Buñuelian attention to crime, contingency and cruelty.

It is evident from Jameson’s two essays, and from his selection of Magritte’s painting for *Postmodernism*, that he is aware of each of the difficulties that Sokurov raises. It is also evident that modernist art and Surrealism are part of the visual

mode that he is arguing for. Certainly ‘On magic realism’ and ‘Soviet magic realism’ each deliberate on the aesthetic process, the mechanics of the films that he discusses. While his contribution to magic realism studies is still measured in post-colonial terms, these two essays arguably demonstrate how magic is conjured through artistic practice, through the camera-eye and post-production special effects. Cinematic magic realism, Jameson argues, is both a cancellation and preservation of modernist aesthetics; it resists the postmodern waning of affect yet employs the techniques of pastiche, kitsch juxtaposition and the recycling of art objects; it refuses narrative coherence yet does not dissolve plot completely; and finally, it presents multiple time frames and multiple exchanges between the animate and inanimate without ever drawing attention to any loss of reality. As much as cinematic magic realism appeals to Jameson for its political contexts, it also appeals to both his cognitive and unconscious desires as a viewer.

Yet I feel that he does not offer a complete methodological framework for cinematic magic realism because ultimately the connections between the filmmakers and their modernist forebears are not made explicit. In the magic realist film, there is no formula that decrees two parts realism, to two parts magic. Although a greater emphasis on psychological relations between humans and their urban surroundings, between a negative identity and an idealised one, informs cinematic magic realism, it is the practice of this ‘working through’, of a dialectical struggle between disparate elements that counts. Magic realism, he insists, need not explicate the mysteries that it presents (this is also an integral component of Surrealist chance, I might add). For example, in *Days of Eclipse* the mysterious agency in the film could be attributed to science and technology, or it could be an ancient religious intervention or the superhuman force of nature. What is fascinating to Jameson is how the magic realist film dramatises mysterious agency whilst maintaining an ontological authenticity of location, history and objects in diegetic worlds that ‘become magical’ as allegories of ‘the whole unimaginable decentred global network itself’ (1992b, 13). He is interested in the ‘indeterminacy’ of meaning left open of ‘assessing the nature of an external force that does something to you, but which, by virtue of the fact that its power transcends your own and [...] also transcends your capacity to understand it or to conceptualize – better still, to represent – it’ (1991, 88).

To conclude, it is evident that Jameson's analysis of cinematic magic realism provides both an aesthetic and a geo-political framework through which to read films that are otherwise difficult to categorise. This is a much more complex procedure than has been attempted by other critics, but by no means sets the 'genre' of magic realism in stone, and is not without problems. By his own admission it is 'statistically inadequate' and overly subjective, tinged with his own utopianism regarding non-First World economies, and it has not satisfied literary critics. And yet, mirroring his fascination with magic realism itself, it remains seductive. In its art historical approach, with emphasis on the role of the cultural object, Jameson's methodology reinstates Roh's *magischer realismus*, and while not explicit, certainly opens up the field to investigation through the modernist avant-garde. While a majority of literary critics have relegated Roh's ideas to the past, Jameson's insistence on magic realist films' desaturation of colour, use of filters, non-synchronous editing (sound and image), self-reflexive camera, unusual and distorted perspective, non-linear narrative, extra-diegetic intercuts, layering of 'multi-temporal' objects, and unexpected juxtapositions shifts the field of cinematic magic realism from folktale to the avant-garde. This has certainly not been the context within which the cinematic mode has found popular currency, (films such as *Pans Labyrinth*, *Chocolat*, or *Big Fish* have found popularity marketed as fantasy films, or vehicles for their stars) yet in light of the mode's historical background - its links with Surrealism, Latin American art, postcolonial politics and philosophical debates regarding the expression of mysterious and invisible 'forces' – Jameson's characterisation has the most purchase.

At a general level Jameson's theorisation is convincing because as a cultural theorist whose critical work spans painting, literature, music and film, his interdisciplinary approach is suited to the slippery intermedial, transhistorical mode of magic realism. Moreover, his Marxist historicism provides, to my mind, the most fitting methodological framework in acknowledging the mode's disruptive flashes of magic without isolating them from the bedrock of buried history. For Jameson, cinematic magic realism preserves memory without nostalgia. Each fragment, each image produces affect because it has not been severed from the chain of production (historical, political, emotional, technical)

from which it emerges. Within this context Jameson's cinematic re-thinking of the political unconscious can be said to resemble the radical philosophy behind the concept of Surrealist collage. This is not to say that cinematic magic realism has the same political agenda or style as those outlined in Breton's manifestos. But the approach of an artist such as Max Ernst - in whose work both disclosure and erasure of boundaries is evident – can be seen in Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse*, revealing shared connections.

In the introduction I stressed the ambiguity of the mode's antithetical moniker. Jameson's essays on cinematic magic realism leave the reader with more questions, with undefined and incomplete concepts – the rhomboid puzzle spinning in the air – but his analysis gets to the root of ambiguity itself, and the need for ways in which to categorise that which falls outside conventional and mainstream categorisation. Thus, while incomplete and lacking in the more technical and historical aspects of modernist art and filmmaking, I believe Jameson's choice of Sokurov, and his attribution of a hybrid Deleuzian/Lyotardian/Freudian reading of affect to the cinematic mode, provide a strong foundation for further investigation. To fully benefit from the explanations of aesthetic magic in 'Soviet magic realism, I would propose widening the scope by including a range of Sokurov's films to illustrate how montage, inter-cutting photographs and paintings into the frame, and what I shall call 'sculptural collage' – the composition of juxtaposed objects within the *mise-en-scene* – extrapolate objects from their contexts and re-frame them to create a new and alternative version of that reality. In addition I would investigate what I consider to be magic realist events in Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979), *Mirror*, (1975) and *Nostalgia* (1983), all of which include scenes in which 'something else' – perhaps scientific, perhaps psychological – causes changes to occur in the reality. Examples of this include the levitation and 'ghost' scenes in *Mirror*, the scene involving telekinesis⁵⁸ at the end of *Stalker*, and the magical juxtaposition in the final scene of *Nostalgia* in which a Russian *dacha* appears inside a Roman ruin.

⁵⁸ As a coda to Jameson's reading of *Fever*, it should be noted that Holland's 1992 film *Olivier*, *Olivier*, also based on 'real events', fits more completely into the mode of cinematic magical realism, because in addition to the criteria outlined in his 1986 article – violence, libidinal intensity, history with gaps, use of colour – it also depicts several instances of supernatural phenomena and marvellous coincidence.

Such overlaps between disparate locations are bridged by an unknown magical power.

Lastly, I believe that Jameson's Soviet branch of cinematic magic realism must also include a study of Sergei Parajanov's (1924 – 1990) body of work, for which there was insufficient space for analysis within the confines of this thesis. In 'Soviet magic realism' Jameson briefly mentions Parajanov's 1964 film (as an example of a 'modernist' tradition of filmmaking; *Tini zabutykh predkiv* [*Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*] is set in a remote and ancient village in the Carpathian mountains during the 19th century, where communities of farmers and loggers live according to seasonal cycles and the stories and curses shaped by complex religious beliefs. The fusion of Catholicism, pagan ritual, sorcery and witchcraft in the film is a confusion of values and histories that correspond to Jameson's definition of 'problematic geographies' and, like Sokurov's film are visualised through a highly self-reflexive aesthetic that draws upon Surrealist practice. The addition of these films would diversify and strengthen an understanding of the mode during a period between the late 1970s until the mid-1990s.

But what next for a global cinematic magic realism; and what can be achieved by expanding Jameson's methodology to analyse contemporary films? The conclusion will suggest the future direction of this research based on my findings regarding the 'gaps' in Roh, Carpentier, and Jameson's 'manifestos' of magic realism, and also the syncretic elements that bind them together.

Conclusion – Irrationality, the Cultural Logic of Cinematic Magic Realism

I began this thesis with an observation of how Surrealist film and cinematic magic realism can often be found in the shared conceptual space of a review or a film programme. Having examined this convergence through the critical roots of the marvellous in its European and Latin American guises, it seems that there are genuine overlaps, but it is only through an analysis of Roh's art historical *schema*, Breton's *merveilleux*, and Carpentier's multi-perspectival ontological-avant-garde mode, that I have been able to trace these. Although I commenced research with a list of films that I wished to discuss regarding their magic realist qualities, in

order to avoid diluting the term even further it has been necessary to first examine the main historical categorisation of the term, even though this has meant traversing painting, photography, literature and film.

Breton, Roh, Carpentier and Jameson's respective theorisations of the marvellous or magical each corresponds to a cultural shift, marking a deliberate challenge to hegemonically defined 'realism'. For Breton and Roh this was a reaction to changes in society brought about by the war, a need to reengage with objects in new ways. For Carpentier, this impetus came from his support for the Cuban revolution and a personal reaction to the gap between European and Latin American realities. For Jameson magic realism offers a path out of the impasse created in his own theorisation of the waning of affect in late capitalist (First World) culture. The motivation behind each of these critical approaches to a contemporary reality provides the foundation on which I have based my research. The shared commonalities – each proposes a theory to express the repressed, hidden, imaginary, taboo, unknown aspects within the modern object world – suggest a coherence that has tended to have been overlooked in scholarship on magic realism that divides the field between Roh and Carpentier. In examining Jameson's writing on the mode, the critical roots forged decades earlier in Paris and Havana come to the surface, supporting his attention to stylistic details and the role of the cultural object.

Despite the political potential of a magic realist methodology – the dissolution of socially constructed boundaries, a challenge to 'fixed' meaning and symbolism, an inclusive representation of dominant and 'minority' cultures, a radicalisation of classical means of cinematic representation such as the Hollywood model – I have had to rely on the critical theories and the art of a handful of affluent, mostly Caucasian, men. For my future research I look to expand the parameters of this critical methodology to include female critics, women filmmakers, and female characters (which are sadly lacking in Jameson's theorisation)⁵⁹, and to extend Carpentier, Sokurov and Jameson's geo-political bias to include the representation of female and queer identities. In addition I wish to focus more

⁵⁹ This expansion would accommodate work by Frida Kahlo, Claude Cahun, Lee Miller, Remedios Varo, Dorothea Tanning, Angela Carter, Sally Potter, Lucile Hadzihalilovic, and Věra Chytilová; and criticism written by Judith Butler, Mieke Bal, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Julia Kristeva, Sara Ahmed, Laura Marks, and Vivian Sobchack among others.

closely on the links between specific types of filmmaking within the avant-garde that Jameson overlooks, most specifically a deeper analysis of Buñuel's films, (particularly those of the 'Mexican' era), the folk-Surrealist films of Ukrainian director Sergei Parajanov, the ethnographic-documentary exemplified in the film and theory of Jean Rouch, and the films of Chilean Raúl Ruiz and Canadian Guy Maddin. What I have stressed throughout this thesis is that cinematic magic realism is a mode drawn from overlapping disciplines and cultures. It is hybrid and reflects hybrid realities. Just as there is a difference between a feminist or Surrealist film and a film that contains elements attributable to a feminist or Surrealist legacy, so too there are magic realist films and films that follow a magic realist methodology. The former are, for the most part, adaptations of magic realist novels, popularised versions that often bear no relation to the magic or marvellous realism of the 'manifestos'. This research is not concerned with such films, but with those in the latter category that follow the aesthetic and geo-political strands of the methodology outlined above.

As cinematic magic realism stems from critical and art historical theories, I shall focus on films by directors that, like Cocteau, Buñuel, Dalí, Richter, Murnau, Sokurov, and Tarkovsky, have written extensively about their artistic practice and aesthetic aims. This, on one hand, is to avoid making assumptions about directorial intent as Jameson unfortunately tends to do (most notably in the case of Tarkovsky), and on the other because these tend to take the form of critical manifestos, for example Ruiz's *The Poetics of Cinema* (2005) and Maddin's *My Winnipeg* (2005) and *From the Atelier Tovar: Selected Writings of Guy Maddin* (1999). In particular I am inspired by Ruiz's interpretation of the cinematic challenge to capture the sometimes invisible, untenable 'something else':

When we live in everyday life we see a certain number of images and we compose other complementary image along a number of axes. Every film incorporates that teeming vision. Every edited sequence has a multiplicity of possible angles, which are merely suggested and which usually serve as counterpoint to the sequence we are actually viewing. But in our lives these possible montages are uncontrollable – because they are necessarily different for every spectator. They form a type of photographic unconscious [...] which we could call "potential montage" (Ruiz 2005).

This idea of an uncontrollable photographic unconscious as ‘potential montage’ brings us closer to a definition of the political unconscious, or the functioning of thought, that is an apt starting point for additional chapters on contemporary cinematic magic realism.

Writing on modernity in 2002, Jameson concedes that theorists had been naive to believe that modernism had been superseded (5-6). Like Roh and Carpentier before him, he notes that with innovation comes repetition, the cyclical patterns of history contained magically within the present: ‘the palpable contradiction between the absolute claim for novelty and the inevitable repetition, the eternal return, of the same gesture of innovation over and over again, does not disqualify the characterization but rather lends it a mesmerizing, forever perplexing and fascinating spell’ (2002, 125). Cinematic magic realism is rooted in the innovative strategies of modernism while having one foot poised towards the globalised, fragmented society of the spectacle, preparing its resistance. Making thought visible, without attributing fixed meaning or social hierarchy, is symptomatic of magic realist art, but it is part of a collective as well as an individual consciousness.

My reading of this critical trajectory concludes with a definition of cinematic magic realism that is much further from the well-known characteristics of literary magic realism than has previously been articulated. Although Jameson’s entry point for his theorisation was ‘Third World’ literature, the evidence in chapter three illustrates how it is the cultural object, the geo-political context, the production of affect, and the self-reflexive effect *combined* that constitutes what he defines as cinematic magic realism. Due to the richness of material in Jameson’s ‘On magic realism’, as I have argued above, critics have focused primarily on the ‘Third’ or ‘Second World’ context, overlooking the typically modernist concerns that he raises regarding the representation of a total – mental and physical – reality. In terms of ‘Soviet magic realism’ even less has been written, but Jameson’s analysis of Sokurov’s film reveals his fascination with the formal elements as well as the political subtext of a cinematic ‘realism’ into which ‘something else’, something not assimilable to a hegemonic rationale – magic-enters.

In his 2002 book *A Singular Modernity: Essays on the Ontology of the Present*, Jameson discusses Adorno's reading of 'the modern gesture' as an artistic attempt to find substitutes for what society has outlawed or repressed (2002, 125). This 'gesture' is what Jameson finds lingering in certain post-Soviet era films, and in the socio-political films of Norden, Holland and Penzo. This is the 'magic' of which he writes, and it should be clearly stated that by magic he does not necessarily mean fantasy or superstition (although this can be part of the non-assimilable in a magic realist film) or technical sleight of hand (although, again, this contributes to the overall defamiliarisation in the aesthetic), but the manifestation of repressed thought, the stirring of revolutionary ideas, the metamorphosis of perception. Irrational occurrences such as Malianov's back flip, the sudden exclamation 'A fly!' during the morgue scene, or Jameson's reaction to a flash of colour, combine with more philosophical ideas in each of the films' allegorical presentation of a horrific (irrational) social context. Jameson's call to the magical corresponds to a much earlier debate within modernism, one in which Adorno voices his theorisation of modernist aesthetics: 'Capitalist society hides and disavows precisely this irrationality [the magic repressed during the Enlightenment, and repressed within mimetic realism], and in contrast to this, art represents truth in a double sense: it maintains the image of its aim, which has been obscured by rationality, and it convicts the status quo of its irrationality and absurdity.' (2004, 70) The cinematic magic realism that I define here is not based simply on a juxtaposition of reality and fantasy worlds. It should be understood as an alternative postmodernism, considering the following citation from Jameson's concluding chapter in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*:

By weakening the older forms of aesthetic autonomy, by breaking down the barriers, not merely between high and low culture, but also between literary language and other kinds of discourse, by dissolving the fictional into a whole immense world of representations and image-spectacles which are henceforth as real as any referent, the postmodern situation has, perhaps unwittingly, released new possibilities, and in particular enabled new and different uses of the art object, owing to the heterogeneity of its contents – some "intrinsic" in the older aestheticizing sense, some "extrinsic" in ways that go well beyond the older conceptions of collage, montage, *ciné vérité* or newspaper novel....If fantasy is epistemological, as Deleuze has argued in the *Anti-Oedipus*, indeed if narrative is itself a form of cognition, then an obvious next step

lies in the systematic harnessing of the energies of those hitherto irrational activities for cognitive purposes (1992, 188).

The list of 'older' aesthetic qualities in this citation is highly significant, and links directly to the historical roots of the mode of magic realism discussed in chapters one and two. These earlier chapters discussed how both Roh and Carpentier strove to distinguish a 'new art' from surrealism, an aim that, I believe, has not truly been successful because the two movements are very much intertwined. It is much easier to distinguish between them in literature, where narrative incoherence and abstract poetry in Surrealist writing bears little resemblance to the less experimental narratives of magic realist fiction. However, in the case of films in which directors employ the stylistic techniques noted in Jameson's analysis, elements of both can be discerned. For example, in both magic realism and Surrealism the relation between subjective and objective worlds is of utmost importance. In magic realism the inner vision is most often connected to a collective history in which dreams and visions are woven into the patterns of quotidian life and are generally less abstracted than in Surrealism, where the inner vision is more individualistic and is often separated from the immediate context. But this is not true of every example, and by no means offers a definitive means of categorisation.

Ernst, Magritte, and Buñuel were all modernists, each arguably straddling the indeterminable divide between Surrealism and magic realism. In 'Soviet magic realism' Jameson makes a passing comment comparing the aesthetic of Buñuel's *Las Hurdes* to Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse*. Their similarity is not simply a matter of the mutual use of monochrome images, or their ethnographic 'documenting' of local peoples, as Jameson suggests, but because Buñuel's film is effectively magic realist. As John Orr argues:

the modern Buñuel helps to break[sic] down the original divide of the 1920s between the expressionist and the surreal aesthetics just as Max Ernst had earlier done in his life and his painting. The dividing line is never clear. What we have instead is a crucial difference of emphasis. The everyday surreal deconstructs narrative sequence while neo-expressionism subtly deforms the mise-en-scene (Orr 1998, 22).

It is significant that Orr should choose to cite Buñuel and Ernst in the same breath; each emphasises the irrational cruelties and uneasy confluences that modern life creates. In Buñuel's Mexican films his departure from the constraints of European Surrealism leads him in a different direction. Jameson considers Buñuel's later work (citing *Le charme discret de la bourgeoisie* [The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie, 1972] and *Cet obscur objet du désir* [That Obscure Object of Desire, 1977] to be closer to the mode of magic realism than to the surrealism of *L'Âge d'or*, because they document the inherent strangeness of a contemporary reality that has no need of emphasis (1992). Buñuel's conviction that film should be representative of the 'anguish of society as a whole' (1995, 138) certainly accords with Jameson's view of cinematic magic realism as the mode of the collective. Moreover, Buñuel's account of filming the villagers for *Las Hurdes*, in which 'a primitive civilization corresponds with a contemporary culture' (220), documents the strange convergence of temporal and social realms that he experienced, thus providing a comprehensive example of Jameson's anthropological magic realism. As a result, the unconscious struggle in the film is revealed not through individual characters, but through the relentless poverty and absurd cruelty of the slum environment itself.

Emulating Roh's historical *schema*, and Jameson's *combinatoire* from *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, I conclude this thesis by proposing the following diagram of the characteristics of the cinematic mode of magic realism to be applied to an analysis of the films suggested above. The diagram is composed of three registers: geographical, aesthetic, and phenomenological. On the left is Roh's European aesthetic, informed by the concurrent movements of Surrealism (indicated by *le merveilleux*) and Expressionism, and Freud's conception of the Uncanny. On the right is Carpentier's American European mode, influenced by the indigenous and ethnic cultures of the continent and a social realism derived from his political stance. As the arrows indicate, there is interaction between these two aspects – Carpentier's involvement in Parisian Surrealism, and the appropriation of indigenous culture for European art, for example.

Cinematic Magic Realism

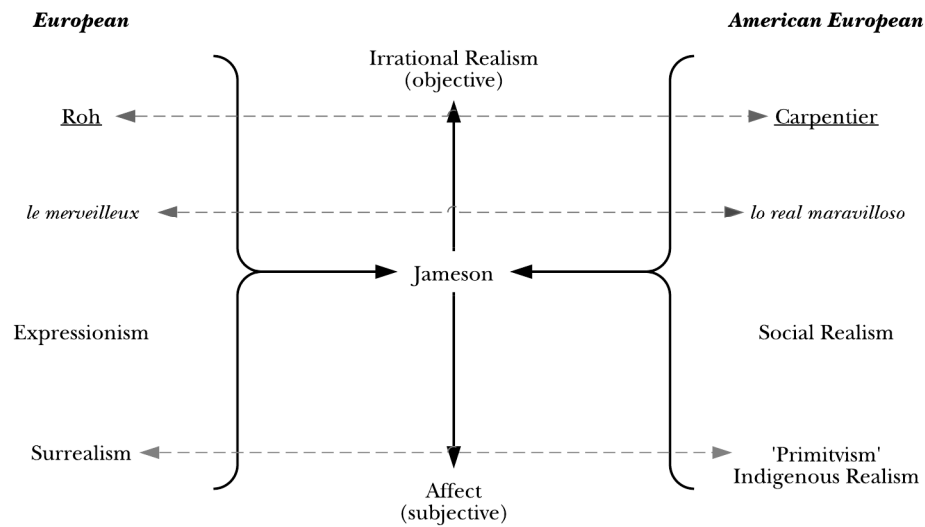


Figure 57: Diagram showing the characteristics of the cinematic mode of magic realism.

On the central axis is the phenomenological register which illustrates the dynamic tension characteristic of both European and American styles of magic realism. At the top is the irrational real, which indicates the ontological object world, the visual manifestation of the irrational, inexplicable, traumatic or imagined. Below is the subjective equivalent of this visual register, affect. The objective effects of radical indeterminacy create affect, and the arrow that connects this central axis represents the dynamism that is created in the movement between the two (the metamorphosis in perception, in Jameson's theorisation). In the centre of the diagram is Jameson, whose theory of cinematic realism draws upon all these aspects conceived in the original mapping of the mode in the modernist avant-garde. Jameson's Marxist view of history, as well as his willingness to embrace lesser known film and 'marginal' culture is also central to my understanding of cinematic magic realism.

I have mapped cinematic magic along these intersecting axes, and within this geographical, aesthetic and phenomenological framework. Both European and American styles share core components: irrationality, affect, the marvellous – in addition to their geographical and political specificity. I propose that the right hand axis could be applied to Buñuel, Parajanov, and Sokurov. Deriving from *lo real maravilloso*, it draws on 'primitivism' and social realism, producing a model with which films similar to Buñuel and Sokurov's 'magical-documentaries' can be

analysed, films that highlight the irrationality of hegemonic power structures, and raise philosophical questions about human existence. This style fits Jameson's model but has less recourse to Rohian mysticism and magic than films which fit the left hand axis. The second style based along the left-hand axis has, like that of the right, the same core aspects, but we can note several differences. It derives from the German metaphysical elements of Roh's *magischer realismus*, borrows stylistically from the Gothic and Expressionist aesthetic found in early German cinema, and is most clearly recycled in the films of Guy Maddin, (which also appropriate a heavily Surrealist aesthetic). This framework is a departure, a new starting point from which to reconsider the mode of cinematic magic realism, with roots firmly in the past. It is mindful of the baroque eon (Lambert 2004), the eternal return, and the recycling of past artistic movements, but it intends to move forwards, hoping to formulate a new theory of magic realism that intersects current philosophical ideas in affect theory and film studies.

Appendices

i. Introduction

1) Spindler sets out three forms: metaphysical magic realism; anthropological magic realism; and ontological magic realism. The first makes reference to the influence of the Italian *pittura metafisica* [metaphysical painting] (1911/12-1920), and more specifically the enigmatic style of Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978) on Roh's art historical mode, describing the production of the magical element 'by the arrangement of natural objects by the means of tricks, devices or optical illusion' combined with 'a serene and melancholy atmosphere' (1993, 80) Anthropological magic realism, he argues, expands beyond the Latin American postcolonial definition of the mode to include 'a thematic and formal preoccupation with the strange, the uncanny and the grotesque, and with violence, deformity and exaggeration' (81). Finally, ontological magic realism 'resolves antimony' within the text without 'recourse to any particular cultural perspective' (82), i.e. lacking the political subtext of the anthropological variant. Ontological magic realism, according to Spindler, is more clearly dominated by a sense of realism than the other two categories. This can be achieved through a subjective narrative device that lends to imagined elements an objective presence in the text.

ii. Chapter One

- 1) Roh's 1925 *schema* for the characteristics of *magischer realismus* (reprinted in Seymour Menton, *Magic Realism Rediscovered 1918-1981*, London: Associated University Presses Ltd., 1983, 17

<i>Expressionism</i>	<i>Post-Expressionism</i>
Ecstatic subjects	Sober subjects
Many religious themes	Very few religious themes
Suppression of the object	The object clarified
Rhythmical	Representational
Emotionally arousing	Intellectually absorbing
Extravagant	Puristically severe
Dynamic	Static

Loud	Quiet
Summary	Thorough
Close-up view	Close and far view
Producing an immediate reaction	Demanding more than one look
In large forms	In large as well as split up forms
Monumental	Miniature
Warm	Cool to cold
Thick color texture	Thin paint surface
Rough	Smooth
Like an uncarved stone	Like a blank sheet of metal
Emphasis on the visibility of the painting process	Effacement of the painting process
Expressive deformation of the object	Harmonic purification of the object
Emphasizing diagonals or Ecstatic subjects slanting motion and acute angles	Emphasising right angles within a framework of parallels
Centrifugal	Centripetal
Primitive and spontaneous	Refined and professionally artistic

2)



Figure 58: George Grosz, *Diabolospieler*, 1920, watercolour and paper, 42.5x46cm.
Private Collection

The first of two paintings by Grosz that Roh includes in *Nach-Expressionismus*, is *Diabolospieler* (*Diablo Player*) 1920, a watercolour painting of geometric construction, painted in beige, terracotta, grey and other shades of brown. This is one of Grosz's 'robot' pictures (Plumb 2006, 29) in which the human subject is dissected into cylindrical parts that echo the shapes of other geometrical objects in the room. It recalls the metaphysical work of de Chirico in style, not only in the linear precision, but also in the sense of fixity into which the figures and objects – as well as the exterior 'window scene' – are locked. Writing a year after he painted *Diablospieler*, Grosz makes clear that he believes there is no longer any space for 'soul' or individual psychology in a capitalist society, and insists that an artist must 'establish control over line and form - it's no longer a question of conjuring up on canvas brightly coloured Expressionistic soul-tapestries - the objectivity and clarity of an engineer's drawing is preferable to the uncontrolled twaddle of the cabal, metaphysics, and ecstatic saints.' (Wood and Harrison 1992, 273-4) Grosz is not interested in metaphysics, but in a linear form that corresponds to the automatism he locates in capitalist commodification. The second of Grosz's paintings is *Daum marries here pedantic automaton "George"*, a caricature of Grosz's girlfriend Eva Peter (whose nickname Maud, becomes the anagram *Daum*) in her underwear, also painted in 1920.



Figure 59: George Grosz. *Daum Marries Her Pedantic Automaton George in May 1920, John Heartfield is Very Glad of It.* 1920. Watercolour and collage, 42 x 30.2 cm., Galerie Nierendorf, Berlin, Germany

As *Daum* leans backwards towards her automaton husband (created from an illustration overlaid with a collage of tiny mechanical parts), the viewer's eye is simultaneously drawn upwards toward the emphasised vertical lines and slices of the wall, and column separating them from the street outside. The painting in its entirety appears as a collage of parts, the lack of depth rendering the figures two-dimensional save for the shading that emphasises *Daum's* breast and pubic hair. Moreover, the extra pair of hands touching the automaton's head seems to have been cut from a classical painting, and the bust of a woman stuck onto the wall in the top left corner underscores the unreality. This example of Dix's work displays the Dadaist intersection of both material (collage) and associative montage akin to that of Raoul Hausmann's *Tatlin at Home* (1920) in which questions of human identity, human ambition and technology are explored.

iii. Chapter Two

1) In the last of Carpentier's film criticism in *Carteles* and reproduced in *Crónicas*, the 1933 article 'La Posición Actual De La Cinematografía Moderna'

['The current position of modern cinematography'] he summarises the 'current state' of the film industry for his Cuban readers, shifting from his earlier focus on film as art, to film as industry, with an emphasis on cultural globalisation. The international appeal of Hollywood and European commercial cinema, (the latter described as being primarily French and German) is aided by the structures of their studio production and distribution systems, and also by the availability of translators to prepare subtitles and publicity. Latin America, on the other hand, and Cuba specifically, cannot participate in this cultural environment because their studios are not yet fully in place, and even the silent films of Cocteau, Picabia and Clair, or Buñuel and Dalí have not yet been shown in Cuban cinemas, (with the coming of sound there is even less contact between the European film industries and Latin America as the majority of French and German 'talkies' have not been dubbed or subtitled in Spanish.) These journalistic reviews, similar in tone to a newspaper editorial¹, document an era in which the film industry had become international. For Cuban readers without the opportunity to see these films in the cinema, Carpentier's articles of the 1920s and 1930s were the next best thing, and he was clearly mindful of making each article relevant to his readership.

2) The Catholic Church was not a unified force in Latin America, indeed there were many factions. The main objective was to ensure that Protestantism or any other denominations did not taint the doctrines devised and issued by the church in Rome. Bishops were appointed (and a descending hierarchy of deans and other clergymen) shortly before 1520, but, amongst fear that secular clergy were growing in number, taking more land and usurping the Church's regulatory power, the Crown created the 'Supreme Council of the Inquisition'. The Council of Trent (Counter Reformation) existed to root out heretics amongst the Europeans and mixed races, (Bakewell, 2010, 147), but also to assert Catholicism. Indians were finally exempted from the Inquisition after its power was misused, but the Crown was still adamant that conversion was the surest means of obtaining unity and peace, and also, contradictorily, to exert

¹ In fact during his years spent in Caracas, (1945-1959) he contributed a diary-style editorial to the Venezuelan newspaper *El Nacional*, in which he wrote on various topics, among which an obituary for Auguste Lumière (1954), the impact of mass media and the cult of the image (1955), sound and radio (1954) and film scores (1957). These articles have been published as an anthology in Alejo Carpentier, *Letra y solfa*, Alexis Márquez R. (ed.), 1975

control. The irony existed that in trying to protect and ‘understand’ the Native Indians, the ministers of the Church were creating an even stronger binary of ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘for the more the church sought to defend and even separate native Americans from settlers and the state, the more its efforts contributed to their domination by the invading culture’ (Bakewell, 190).

3) Saint Teresa was a Carmelite nun and a saint of the period of the Spanish Counter-Reformation. After her father’s death, she purported to have heard voices and went into trances. It is the account of one these visions and her trance-like response to it, that form the story depicted here by Bernini. A quote from her autobiography reads: ‘When he pulled it out I felt that he took them [her entrails] with him and left me utterly consumed by the great love of God. The pain was so severe that it made me utter several moans. The sweetness caused by this intense pain is so extreme that one cannot possibly wish it to cease, nor is one’s soul then content with anything but God.’ See *The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila by Herself*, 2005. In *Seventeenth Century Art and Architecture*, edited by Ann Sutherland Harris, 110. The vision of receiving transverberation from an angel is, according to Carmelite doctrine, a metaphor for receiving the word of God. Transverberation is a Catholic term for a spiritual wounding of the heart; and can refer to a mystical vision or the physical wounding by a dart or flame of love.

4) Jacques Lacan’s *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge* (Seminar XX) famously explores the question of female desire, and addresses Bernini’s statue in his argument. His analysis locates St Teresa’s ecstasy in sexual pleasure, and argues that the statue frames her orgasm at the moment when the spectator (in this case the *male* spectator) is looking: ‘you need to go to Rome and see the statue by Bernini to immediately understand that she’s coming. There’s no doubt about it. What is she getting off on?’ See Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, Book XX: Encore 1972-1973*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Bruce Fink, 1998, 76. For a non-gender specific analysis of the affect of *Teresa* that explores the spatial and temporal limits of the sculpture see Patricia MacCormack, *Cinesexuality*, 2008

5) This is best illustrated in the painting by Luís de Mena (c1750) entitled ‘*Casta*’ or *The Virgin of Guadalupe*, which depicts the caste system of New Spain. The

painting shows The Virgin of Guadalupe -a dark-skinned virgin who was said to have appeared as an imprint on a dead man's body, or a vision transmitted through god. See Lois Parkinson Zamora, 'Quetzalcóatl's Mirror and Guadalupe's Eye' 2006. in *The Inordinate Eye*, 2006. Another example of the representation of racial diversity was painted by Pérez Holguín (Bolivian Baroque artist, 1660-1732), *Entrance into Potosí of the Viceroy Archbishop Morcillo* (1718): The painting is an idealised scene in which the viceroy enters, and the inhabitants witness his arrival, showing only accord. Viceregal cities displayed fantastic churches and city halls, making exterior space a site for ceremony and display. The public signing of documents and the entrance of foreign dignitaries into the colonies was a popular scene, commissioned by the viceroys and designed to exhibit the glorious success of European power. According to Kelly Donahue-Wallace, 'Each person's presence in this display embodies his/her tacit approval of and participation in the city's ethnic and economic hierarchy that is performed just as much by the architectural spaces the potosínos occupy as by the dress and behaviour they exhibit' (2008, 131).

iv. Chapter Three

- 1) Both Lyotard and Jameson define postmodernism in relation to that which preceded it, modernism; but their ideas regarding the disappearance, dilution or dissolution of modernism conclude differently. Lyotard posits the shift into a postmodern age at the end of the 1950s and indicates how it can be identified in the 'commercialisation' of knowledge through computerised technologies. His is a linguistic analysis of a world in which, at differing rates, what he terms metanarratives (grand or totalising theories) – religious histories, national myths, political discourses, heroic stories – are 'dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements' (Harrison and Wood 2010, 999). Universalising explanations shatter into fragments that no longer signify any kind of consensus. However, he offers a positive view of postmodern culture in which diversity and fragmentation do not signify a loss or lack, but rather signify the possibility for new 'intensities' and discoveries. The emptiness and unrepresentability of the fragment, he argues, can form new connections and new representations. Lyotard puts forward a thesis that turns

accelerated commodification back on itself; he insists that 'A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant' (2010, 1014).

Jameson, however, argues that this view simply leads to a repetition in which something is lost, and something new is created in its place, surmising that 'Lyotard is [...] quite unwilling to posit a postmodernist stage radically different from the period of high modernism' (1984b, xv). He challenges Lyotard's description of postmodernism's revival of the avant-garde. For Jameson, the postmodern has lost revolutionary affect and is addressing a different cultural condition, born out of a different socio-economic situation. T.J. Clark concurs that the conditions of postmodernism differ from those of modernism:

"Image", "body", "landscape", "machine" - these (and other) key terms of modernism's opposing language are robbed of their criticality by the sheer rapidity of their circulation in the new image-circuits, and the ability of those circuits to blur distinctions, to flatten and derealize, to turn every idea or delight or horror into a fifteen-second vignette' (Clark 2000, 88).²

² Clark nods to Warhol here – 'fifteen seconds' – but later in his essay takes an increasingly antithetical stance to Jameson's reading of Warhol as a quintessential postmodern artist.

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